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DE'S OATH.

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LADY ADELAIDE'S OATH.

BY

MRS. HENRY WOOD,

AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE," "THE CHANNINGS," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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LADY ADELAIDE'S OATH.

CHAPTER I.

CHANGES.

HERBERT GEOFFRY, seventeenth Baron Dane, stepped into the honours of his ancestors, inherited and conferred. He set out with an intention to deserve them. The unsigned will of the late Lord Dane he carried out to the letter. Every wish stated in it he honourably fulfilled; every legacy bequeathed in it he paid, just as though the deed had been duly executed. The Lady Adelaide's name was down in it for fifteen thousand pounds, and that sum was paid over to Mr. Lester.

But some great change had come over the young lord; a strange sadness seemed to hang

ever upon him. He confined himself very much to the Castle, paying few visits, and living as quietly as he could well do. The impulsive, careless spendthrift appeared to have taken another nature with his inheritance, and to have become sober and prudent all at once. Marks of this were daily apparent, and Danesheld looked on in wonder. Some of the domestics were dismissed with a year's wages, and the household at the Castle was re-organised on a small scale.

If there was one person not satisfied with the new peer, that one was John Mitchel: for he had been rejected as tenant for the Sailors' Rest. Mr. Apperly had gone on and completed the assignment of the lease to the man, in spite of Lord Dane's warning: he was destined to find the parchment useless; and that the Sailors' Rest was to be given to Richard Ravensbird.

"To Ravensbird!" he exclaimed in his astonishment when the news burst upon him—not that the word "burst" is quite appropriate, for Lord Dane spoke in a particularly calm unemotional tone. "*Ravensbird!* Surely your lordship does not intend to bestow it upon him?"

"Yes, I do. Did you not know he was one of the applicants?"

"O, I knew *that*, fast enough. But I should have thought your lordship would put him at the bottom of the list; or, rather, put him out of it altogether. I should."

"Your opinion and mine, then, Apperly, are at issue upon the point," said Lord Dane pleasantly. "I cannot divest myself of the feeling that the man has had some injustice dealt out to him lately; and I think we Danes owe him a recompense. And—putting that apart—why should I not let him have the house? He is ready with the money, and will no doubt be a safe tenant."

"Can your mind entirely absolve him from all suspicion—in regard to that night's fatal work?"

"It has absolved him long ago," was Lord Dane's reply. "I as fully and truly believe in Ravensbird's alibi as I do that you and I are talking face to face. I should not be likely, otherwise, to let him rent any house of mine."

"It will be a shocking blow to Mitchel," groaned Mr. Apperly, thinking of a certain bank-note that was lying in his desk.

"Not more than it would be to Ravensbird, if I chose Mitchel and rejected him. In common justice, I repeat, it is Ravensbird who ought to have it; he was the first to apply to Hawthorne, and he also came to me, asking my interest with Lord Dane."

"Lord Dane would never have given it him," said the lawyer testily. "He gave it to Mitchel. It was as good as giving it."

"At any rate, I elect in favour of Ravensbird," was the decisive answer; and the lawyer winced at the tone. "You can make out the necessary papers. It is exceedingly unjust, I know, to cast one man's sin upon another," resumed Lord Dane after a pause, "but, to tell you the truth, I can't bear to hear the name of Mitchel. Had his brother, the preventive man, not lost his wits that night, Harry Dane might now be a living man."

"In that case your lordship would not be Lord Dane," was the lawyer's bold rejoinder.

"A very slight calamity, that, in comparison with his death," returned Lord Dane. "I'd give up all my revenues cheerfully, Apperly, if it would bring him to life again."

So Mr. Apperly had to make out fresh papers and return the ten-pound note, which was something like having a tooth drawn. No chance was there of getting any such a *douceur* from Ravensbird : if that gentleman could not obtain his ends by sturdy independence in a fair field, he would never have bribed for them. Mr. Apperly, in his anger, told John Mitchel that the new Lord Dane could not forgive his brother for having "played the idiot" that night : and John Mitchel forthwith rushed off foaming to the coastguardsman, with reproaches loud and deep for having played it ; which nearly brought another fit on that weak and shrinking man.

Ravensbird paid down the requisite money, and, on the departure of Hawthorne, took due possession of the Sailors' Rest. One singular clause Lord Dane caused to be inserted in the lease : that, by giving Ravensbird six weeks' notice, he could at any time oblige him to go out of the house. Ravensbird demurred to this ; he had never heard of such a proviso in any lease in the world, he said, and he should like to know the motive for inserting it. Lord Dane did not

tell the motive, but he was resolute as to its insertion: and Ravensbird at length signed the lease, objectionable clause and all, and entered into possession.

“Much good Ravensbird would do at it! or any other man who'd got no wife!” was one of the gratuitous comments offered by the busy neighbourhood. “Who ever heard of an inn getting along without a landlady?” Ravensbird heard all with the coolest equanimity, never a feature ruffling.

Changes took place at the Hall. Miss Bordillion was moving out of it into Cliff Cottage, taking Edith. She had saved a very little money out of her hundred-a-year income, which she expended on furniture, and Mr. Lester desired her to send down any articles she liked from the Hall. Tiffle made a vinegar face over the generosity, and bewailed it openly; though Miss Bordillion chose but a mere few, and those of the plainest; odds and ends of things that would never be missed.

On the day following Lord Dane's funeral, Mr. and Lady Adelaide Lester quitted Danesheld

for Paris; an unknown place to Adelaide, which she had long been wild to see, believing it to be neither more nor less than the paradise of the lower world. Mademoiselle Sophie Deffloe had repeatedly assured her that it was nothing else. This gave Miss Bordillion time for her arrangements: as *they* were gone, there was no immediate hurry for her to quit the Hall: but she would have left it before they returned.

Tiffle was playing her cards well. Upon Lady Adelaide's coming home in the unexpected manner related, Tiffle, though apparently all smiles and sweetness, was inwardly full of vengeance, and vowed to leave at the month's end. But during the very few days that Lady Adelaide and Mr. Lester remained at the Hall, Tiffle began to discern that she might possibly make her cards answer. Lady Adelaide was young, careless, inexperienced, yielding: when Tiffle went to her for orders she would say, "Oh, I don't know anything about it; do as you like; ask Miss Bordillion:" and it dawned over Tiffle's mind that with this young lady at the household's head, she *could* do as she liked; more effectually than she

had done even during the timid sway of that other lady. And so Tiffle gave her cards a shuffle, and set about ingratiating herself with the new mistress, making things easy and comfortable for her on her return.

The weeks went on. Miss Dane still inhabited her former home, the little ivied house—very much to her own dissatisfaction. Dane Castle seemed an enviable place to live at: it was very strange, she thought, that her brother could not have her with him, and one day she told him so. She paid him a visit of many hours most days, taking luncheon at the Castle, often dinner, and receiving, as the Castle's mistress, any visitors who might call. She and her brother were standing together at the drawing-room window when she spoke, their eyes following a carriage that was bowling away smoothly down the road; a close carriage, all its appointments handsome. Its inmates had just been paying their first visit at the Castle—Mr. and Lady Adelaide Lester. Miss Dane stood by her brother in deep mourning, and her curls were as drooping as ever, and her cheeks as pink.

It was the first time Lord Dane had seen Lady Adelaide since her marriage. He called at the Hall after their return—fulfilling punctually the social requirements of life—but they were gone out for a drive. The sojourn in Paris had lasted two months, and Lady Adelaide, who had plunged into all the gaiety that the season allowed, seemed glad to be at home again.

“How changed she is, Herbert!” exclaimed Miss Dane, as the carriage receded from their sight.

“Shall you ever remember to drop that past name of mine, do you think, Cecilia?” was the rejoinder of Lord Dane.

“Geoffry, then, to please you. I do forget; but it does not matter much, does it, dear? Don’t you think she’s changed somehow?”

“Not particularly, that I see.”

“Oh! but she is, though. She’s thin and pale and worn; she looks like one who is wearied to death.”

He made no rejoinder. He was leaning against the side of the deep window-frame, his eyes fixed on the distant waves beyond the ruins,

his unconscious fingers playing with his watch-guard. Was he thinking of those happy meetings he had used to hold with her, his best and dearest love; with her who was now the wife of another?

"I hope she has not made a mistake," resumed Miss Dane, in her little chirping voice. "It must be very nice to be married, and have a beautiful home, and a husband of your own, especially if he's handsome and not too old; but, oh dear! if it does not turn out happily afterwards! I should have a bower made of weeping willows, and sit in it with my guitar, and cry all day, if it were my case. That would be a little relief, wouldn't it, Geoffrey?"

Geoffrey just moved his lips by way of intimating that he heard. But Miss Dane was one of those happy persons who can talk on with unruffled equanimity, answered or not answered.

"He's very handsome; everybody knows that: sometimes, when I'm looking at him in church, I wonder whether there's another face in the world as beautiful as his. But I never fell in love with him, Geoffrey; I never did, indeed: he

has had one wife, you know, and very nice she was, though delicate : and his children are half as old as I am. Perhaps Adelaide thinks of that, now that it's too late. Oh dear !”

Lord Dane took up a glass that lay on the table behind him, and regarded attentively a ship that was passing. The sun's rays played upon his bright hair, upon his pale features, on which there sat a sad, subdued sort of expression, that Miss Dane did not remember to have previously seen.

“Geoffry, *you* look changed,” she said, shaking back her smooth ringlets : “and do you know *you are* changed, now I come to think of it ! You are so much more silent than you used to be, and you seem always to be thinking. I'm sure you did not say three words to Adelaide just now, and that was not polite of you ; she's a bride, you know, dear.”

“I was talking with Mr. Lester.”

“Not much. Herbert, I'll tell you what it is—Geoffry, I mean—you are getting moped through living alone in this large place, not a soul to speak for hours, morning and evening, but

the servants. And I'm sure I'm moped at home."

"That vessel has the Prussian flag flying, Cecilia!" exclaimed Lord Dane, steadying the glass. "She's a queer build. Wouldn't you like to look at her?"

"Oh Geoffry, dear, I don't care to look at flags and ships. One can't see the officers from this distance, or it might be nice. I want something else, Geoffry."

"Well, what do you want?" he asked, looking down kindly on the weak, childish, but ever sweet-tempered face, turned pleadingly to his.

"I've never teased you about it, Geoffry, but indeed I wish you'd let me. It's hardly right, now that you are the great Lord Dane."

"What is not right?"

"To leave me in that poor little house all alone, while you enjoy this large fine castle," she answered, smoothing down the crape trimmings on her gown, as we sometimes see a timid little maiden smoothing down her white pinafore as she stands shyly before us. "You might let me come and live here, Geoffry. It is strange you should

not. We always have lived together, and I am your only sister."

"Whenever I settle down at the Castle, Cecilia, you shall come to it."

"But have you not settled down?"

"No. I am going away from it almost immediately. It has been my intention to travel ever since my uncle died; but business matters have delayed my departure. I shall soon be away now."

"For how long?"

"An indefinite time."

"Oh dear!" ejaculated Miss Dane.

"I have never had an opportunity of visiting the continental world, beyond one or two brief snatches at Paris; I have been too poor, as you know," resumed Lord Dane, "There's nothing to prevent me now."

"And what am I to do?" she asked, piteously.

"Make yourself happy at home with your birds and your flowers, Cely; as you will be. There's not a woman living who possesses a more cheerful and contented mind than you."

"But, Geoffry, can I stay all alone by myself?"

"I should not trust you," he answered, with a faint attempt to be gay. "You shall have Mrs. Knox with you, and I'll allow you any amount of income you may ask for."

"I shall like to have Mrs. Knox," returned Miss Dane, who was as easily pleased as a child. And how long shall you be away, Geoffry—three months?"

"Three years, more likely."

"Oh, Geoffry!"

He interrupted the startled scream. In truth, he had spoken in careless haste, not having intended to admit so much.

"I really cannot tell how long I shall remain away, Cecilia. Possessing no definite plans, it is impossible to say what I may do, or where I may go. Of one thing you may rest assured—that I shall come back some time, Heaven permitting me; and when I do come, you shall make your home here at the Castle, and be its mistress."

"How nice that will be!" she said, twirling her fingers in and out of her light-brown ringlets.

"But, Geoffry, you may be bringing home a wife! You may, you know."

Geoffry Dane shook his head. "I think not," he answered, and his tone was rather peculiarly decisive. "But, Cecilia—about yourself, during my absence. You'd like a little pony-carriage, would you not? and you must keep one or two additional servants; I should prefer it. You will be more comfortable, I know, in the small home, than you would be in this rambling, gloomy old place without me. When I return to protect you in it, you shall play the grande dame."

Cecilia Dane clapped her hands; but even in the very act, some feeling stole over her, which caused her to bend her pink cheeks and her drooping eyelids in confusion.

"What is it, Cely?"

"I may be married myself by that time, Geoffry. Don't you think so?"

Lord Dane laughed. "Of course you may. But, Cecilia"—and his tone turned to gravity—"you must promise me one thing: that you will not marry any one, that is, that you will not engage yourself to any one, without first writing to

consult me. I'll never stand in your way, when it is for your real happiness ; but you have money, and will have more, and you don't know what sort of pretenders may be coming after it. Confide in Mrs. Knox, as you did when you were a little girl ; and write constantly to me. You will promise all this ?”

“ I promise it faithfully, Geoffry ; I know I am not wise ; I promise it all.”

And Lord Dane knew that he might implicitly trust to her. As she said, she was not wise, and she was older than he, but she was very easily guided ; and she yielded herself to his judgment always, with the perfect, simple faith of a little child.

Did you observe one remark made by Miss Dane, in the above conversation ? It related to Lady Adelaide Lester : that she was changed ; was thin, and pale, and worn, looking like one who is wearied to death.

As the days and the weeks went on, others began to make the same remark : Lady Adelaide seemed to have something the matter with her. She was happy enough with Mr. Lester, so far as

the world saw ; but there was a listless apathy in her manner which does not in general go with the perfection of content. One peculiarity arose that had never been observed in her before : when accosted suddenly, she would start as if in fear, and be some moments recovering her tremor. Had she made a mistake in marrying George Lester ? had the conviction of it come, now that it was too late ? Lord Dane, her once betrothed lover, had warned her that her days, if she did marry him, would be one long unsatisfied yearning—a yearning for escape from the existence she had imposed on herself. Had he spoken with prevision ? Indeed it seemed that some strange yearning after what was not, lay upon her ; and lay upon her heavily. That she was a disappointed, dissatisfied woman, who had some dark shadow following her, a keen discernor could not doubt. It might be, that she would outlive it under the healing influence of time.

One, at least, did not see or suspect this ; and that was Mr. Lester. That gentlemen's fondness for his wife was as a very passion, in which all ordinary observation was lost. He only lived to

love her, to study her wishes, to obey her as a slave. Her slightest will was made law ; her most trifling wish was carried out. That it would render her imperious and exacting was almost sure ; but Mr. Lester was too completely absorbed in the present to think of the future. He never suspected that she was not happy. Since her marriage her health had been rather delicate ; quite sufficient, in that fond man's judgment, to account for her loss of spirits : and he supposed, as she regained her strength, and the past troubles at the Castle grew more distant, the old gaiety, the saucy repartee, would come again. She had no resident ties at the hall : Wilfred Lester had returned to Rugby, and Maria was at Cliff Cottage, under the charge of Miss Bordillion. In Mr. Lester's doting love for his new wife, the love of his children was fading down to a faint sentiment. He had never been a man to bestow upon them much tenderness ; and it is probable that his wife had it in her power to draw him effectually from them, if she chose to do so.

“ Shall Maria remain at home with a governess, or shall I place her with Miss Bordil-

lion?" he had asked his wife on their return from Paris.

"Place her with Miss Bordillion," said Lady Adelaide at once; "there will be no responsibility on me, and we shall be better alone. She can come and stay with us at times, you know."

So Mr. Lester made the arrangement with Miss Bordillion, paying her an adequate sum with Maria, as he would have done at a first-class school: and the Hall was free.

One morning Sophie Deffloe came to her mistress. She would give warning, if my lady pleased—she hoped my lady would allow her to leave as soon as was convenient.

Lady Adelaide, as much surprised and annoyed as anything seemed to have power to surprise or annoy her now, inquired, with some asperity, what Sophie meant; and Sophie, with matter-of-fact equanimity, as became one of her nation, replied that she had made up her mind to marry herself to Richard Ravensbird.

"Ravensbird has taken to the Sailors' Rest!" exclaimed Lady Adelaide.

"Oh dear yes, my lady, these three months past, and very well he is doing at it."

"But, Sophie, you would surely never go to live there; to stand in the bar and draw ale for customers!"

"My faith, but I would," said Sophie. "Why not? I think it is just the sort of life I should like, my lady."

Lady Adelaide made a gesture of contempt: there was no accounting for taste. "But should you like Ravensbird?" she asked; "he is very ugly."

"As I tell him every day; but for myself, my lady, I don't find him so ugly. It has happened before now," added the bold Sophie, "that wives have been happier with ugly men than with handsome ones. Any way, I mean to try it, when your ladyship can suit yourself."

The retort did not altogether please Lady Adelaide, and she haughtily told Sophie Deffloe that she was at liberty to leave at once. There's an old saying, "cutting off your nose to spite your face;" had Sophie taken her lady at her word, it would have been an exemplification of it, for Lady Adel-

aide could not have got on without her, or some one to replace her. But at this juncture Tiffle stepped in ; Tiffle with her deferent manner, and her tongue of oil. If my lady pleased, she would supply Sophie's place for the present : she understood thoroughly the duties of a lady's maid, and her housekeeping office was not so onerous but it left plenty of time on her hands.

For Tiffle voluntarily to offer to saddle herself with a double duty, would have astounded the ears of her friends, had they heard it made. But Tiffle knew what she was about : to get Mademoiselle Sophie Deffloe and her independence out of the house, Tiffle would have worked her skinny hands to the bone ; to acquire greater and greater sway over her yielding young mistress, she would have toiled for ever. There was not much chance of that while Sophie was there ; and Tiffle gave a lift to the lever of removal. She had been living in a state of chronic rage with Sophie ; for Sophie utterly repudiated the authority of the housekeeper, which was exercised with so crafty a hand over the rest of the household.

Lady Adelaide caught at the offer. Anything

for a change ; and, besides, during the last few months, she had got into a habit of shrinking from her maid, instead of reproving her, when the girl on occasion spoke with unwarrantable freedom. In her inmost heart she was perhaps glad to be rid of the French girl ; and Sophie found she was really at liberty to depart when she pleased.

So the arrangement was carried out. Sophie Deffloe became the wife of Richard Ravensbird ; that newly-elevated lady, taking up her post in the bar at nine o'clock on the morning after her marriage day, with all the cool and easy self-possession of a Frenchwoman ; and Tiffle entered on her duties as maid to the Lady Adelaide. It was intended by the latter to be only a temporary arrangement, while she looked out for some one to replace Sophie ; but Tiffle became so delightfully useful, that Lady Adelaide was in no hurry to commence the search. Tiffle made herself quite necessary to her mistress, and beguiled her listless ears with no end of insinuating gossip, touching the household, touching Miss Bordillion, especially touching Master Wilfred Lester. Tiffle meant from the first to prejudice her mistress against

that unconscious young gentleman; and Tiffle did it.

And thus the months went on; Lord Dane had departed on his intended prolonged continental tour; Bruff and one or two servants being left to take care of the Castle. Miss Dane remained at the little ivied house with her birds and her flowers, and her new pony-carriage, and her guitar, and Mrs. Knox, a worthy middle-aged lady who had once been her governess. Ravensbird and his wife did well at the Sailors' Rest: and Tiffle wormed herself further and further into the confidence of her mistress.

No little excitement was created one day in Danesheld by the arrival of a packman in close custody, who had been arrested at Great Cross. A zealous policeman, seeing that this man's appearance tallied with the description of the one, supposed now to have been the murderer of Harry Dane, arrested him forthwith and took him off to Danesheld. However, when Drake was sent for, he declared that he was not the man whom he had seen disputing with Captain Dane; and Squire Lester confirmed this. Both were tall, big men,

it was true; but the faces were quite dissimilar, said Mr. Lester: this was rather a pleasant-looking man, and seemed honest enough; the other was evil-looking. So the man perforce was set at liberty again, as Ravensbird had been.

"Shall you ever get the right one, do you think, Bent?" Mr. Lester stopped to ask of the sergeant.

Bent shook his head. "I hardly know what to think, sir. The fellow has hid himself effectual, that's certain; but these things mostly do come out, sooner or later. I suppose, sir, you never hear your lady make any allusion to that night's work?"

"Not any. It would not be a pleasant theme for her to choose."

"It was very odd, but I could not divest myself of the notion at the time, that her ladyship knew more than she told us," resumed the sergeant.

Mr. Lester turned his face on the speaker, the haughty expression, which had begun to dawn upon it, giving way to surprise.

"Lady Adelaide took an oath that she did not, sergeant."

"I know she did," answered the sergeant, biting bits off an end of straw.

"Then you need not raise any further question on that score. Good-day, Bent."

"I'm aware I needn't," said the sergeant to himself, as he nodded his parting salutation to Mr. Lester: "'twouldn't be of any use if I did. But I know one thing—that if any woman ever puzzled me since I joined, it was that one, oath or no oath. She's a deep one, I'll swear, is my Lady Adelaide."

Thus matters progressed at Danesheld. And for the next nine or ten years no particular change occurred that we need stop to notice. A very long period, you will think, nine or ten years. True; but they do not seem so long in the passing to the actors in them, neither did these uneventful years to Danesheld. Events came thick enough afterwards.

CHAPTER II.

WILFRED LESTER COMES TO GRIEF.

YOU would observe the term in the last chapter, "nine or ten years," and possibly think it more vague than it need be. But it was put with a purpose: though the narrative will finally and very speedily progress after the end of the tenth year, we must first of all notice something that occurred at the end of the ninth.

Danesheld Hall was alive with bustling little feet and merry voices, six children having been born to Lady Adelaide Lester and her husband. They had not altogether brought peace with them; they might have brought more of that had they entailed less expense. Mr. Lester was now a man of care and perplexity, scheming how he might best meet the heavy calls upon him. But he believed in his wife still, and loved her as few men, come to his age, do love.

And she? Ah, well, I hardly know what to say. Were I to tell you that she had been a bad wife to him, it might be taken up in a wrong light. A strictly faithful wife she was, but a very heartless one.

Women, as well as men, must have some object in life, unless they would be hopelessly miserable. Whether it be bad or whether it be good, an object there must be, and generally is. Lady Adelaide Lester had none. It seemed that she did not care sufficiently for existence to have one. The old listlessness had settled into a state of chronic ennui, and she passed her frivolous days in escaping from it. From the very first she had run heedlessly into expense, had carried her husband along with her: the scale of expenditure that would be moderate for the head of Dane Castle, was simply ruinous for the head of Danesheld Hall; but Lady Adelaide had not the sense to see this. Her dress alone cost, Heaven knew how much: ten times more than it ought to have done. They had a town house now, and entered into all the gaieties of the London season, year after year; they spent the early spring in Paris

as a rule, and Lady Adelaide said she could not exist without it; indeed, the only time when they were tolerably quiet was the autumn period of the year; and that was spent at Danesheld. How all this could be supported on Mr. Lester's (comparatively) slender income of 3000*l.* a year, I'll leave you to judge. It was not quite 3000*l.* now; he had been obliged to sell out capital, and so had lessened it; and a large portion of this belonged to Miss Lester. The 15,000*l.* bequeathed to Lady Adelaide by the late Lord Dane was as a drop of water in the ocean, and had been spent long ago. The children, coming on so fast, were no hindrance to the restlessness, the extravagance, of their mother: there was a very temporary seclusion as each little being appeared, and then it was turned over to a hired nurse, and the Lady Adelaide was herself again. It was not that she did not love her children: she loved them with a jealous, exacting love; but she thought *to be* with children was one of the cardinal ills of earth, and except at Danesheld rarely had them with her. She loved them so much as to be blindly unjust—you will hear how presently—but she attempted no sort of

training. She liked them to come in to dessert with spreading skirts and shining curls, and she would take them abroad in the carriage, decked out like little dolls. At these times they were ruinously indulged. Poor Mr. Lester thought all the care that had come upon him was but the natural result of a large family; and he bemoaned his ill fate that the gods had not been favourable to him in the curtailment of the number.

Tiffle was at the Hall still, and Tiffle flourished. She retained her post as waiting-maid to Lady Adelaide, and she ruled the servants with the hand of an authority, strong, and firm, and indisputable. In the first years of the marriage, Tiffle had accompanied Lady Adelaide in her journeys; but when the family increased, it was found necessary for Tiffle to remain at the Hall in control, and Lady Adelaide engaged a French waiting-maid: an airy damsel who talked French with the little ones when she was at the Hall, and during these sojourns yielding very much of her place about her lady to Tiffle.

In one matter Tiffle had succeeded to her utmost satisfaction—the implanting of a bitter

feud between Lady Adelaide and Wilfred Lester. There was no open warfare, and Wilfred saw but little of Lady Adelaide at any time; but it is not too strong an expression to say that there was mutual hatred in either heart. In Lady Adelaide's blind injustice, she regarded Wilfred as an interloper in the house; as one who would inflict a grievous wrong upon her own children if Mr. Lester should bequeath to him—as it might reasonably be supposed he would—his due share of the patrimony. Wilfred's due share would have been a large share, since more than half of Mr. Lester's fortune came to him from his first wife. Wilfred, on his side, naturally resented in his heart the second marriage of his father, since it had resulted in the virtual breaking up of the home for himself and sister. They occasionally went to it, it is true, but as visitors, more than children of the house—as interlopers, in fact; and it was made evident to both they were regarded as such; more especially evident was it made to Wilfred. It was not possible but that the injustice should create a very bitter feeling in Wilfred's heart. His father seemed to be weaned from him more

and more as the days went on, and Wilfred *knew* that Lady Adelaide made mischief between them.

Wilfred went to college early, and when he had kept the appointed terms, a commission was purchased for him in one of the crack regiments. It will set him up, said Lady Adelaide to her husband; and, she mentally added to herself, take him away from being a nuisance here. Set him up! Everybody knows what are the expenses of the officers in these exclusive corps; not absolutely necessary expenses, but rendered essential by that all-potent incubus—custom; example; the doing as others do. The pay of one of these officers, compared to his expenditure, is as a drop of water in the ocean; most of them are men of rank; all of some wealth; and those who do not possess a reserved purse, and a tolerably heavy one too, have no business to join, for they are safe to come to grief. Mr. Lester ought to have weighed these considerations, and remembered how very little he could afford to allow his son.

He did not; and Wilfred entered. Careless, goodnatured, attractive, and remarkably handsome, he was just the man to be made much of

by his brother officers ; never was there a young fellow more popular in the corps than Cornet Lester ; and—it is of no use to mince the matter—never was there one who ran more heedlessly into extravagance. Example is contagious, and Cornet Lester suffered himself to be swayed by it—swayed and ruined. Had Mr. Lester made him a better allowance—as he ought to have done, or else not have placed him in the regiment—it would still have been swallowed up, though affairs might not have come to a crisis so soon as they did. Wilfred had just four years' swing, and then Mr. Lester was summoned to London in haste. Mr. Wilfred had fallen into the hands of the Philistines, and was in durance vile. He confessed his position openly enough to his father, and laid the full statement of affairs before him. Money he must have ; and not a small sum either.

“ I can't give it you,” said Mr. Lester.

“ Then it will not be possible for me to remain in the regiment.”

“ It is not possible. You will have to sell out, and apply the money to the liquidation of your debts.”

The young officer looked blank.

“It is a cruel alternative, sir.”

“It is an imperative one,” said Mr. Lester.

“I have not said a word of reproach to you, Wilfred, as some fathers would have done, for I blame myself as much as I blame you. I did know something of the temptations you would have to incur; but it seems to me that young men—of necessity, as you have just told me—run out of three or four times the money that they did in my day. It is a most unfortunate affair, and will be utter ruin to your prospects. I would help you if I could, Wilfred—I would, indeed; but it is not in my power: I am pressed for money in a way myself that I do not care to speak of even to you.”

“Thanks to the career of extravagance of my lady,” thought Wilfrid in his heart. “Talk of mine!”

“You must sell out,” continued Mr. Lester. “My undertaking—which you will have to make good—will release you from this place, I suppose, and things can be managed quietly. If this list comprises all your debts, the proceeds of your

commission will be about sufficient to liquidate them."

"And after that?"

"After that? I'm sure I don't know. You should have thought of the future before. I suppose you must come home for a time. Perhaps I may be able to get you some government appointment."

And this alternative was adopted. But the having to sell out was a cruel blow to Wilfred Lester. Neither were the funds thus realised found to be fully sufficient, and Mr. Lester had to screw out the rest in the best way he could. It is possible that he felt his son—his eldest son—had not been dealt with precisely as he ought to have been, and the feeling made him lenient now. Wilfred knew he had not. He saw his prospects cut off—his future hopeless—and when things were finally settled, and he went home to the Hall, like bad money returned, he felt as a blighted man, caring little what became of him. The high rate of home expenditure was kept up on his own mother's money; but for his father's second wife, for the second family, he should not

have suffered; and he regarded himself as a kind of sacrifice on the shrine of everything that was unjust.

Lady Adelaide received him with semi-graciousness. Outwardly, she was freezingly polite; but she dispensed the politeness in her own fashion, and Wilfred had never felt himself so like an interloper. A tacit sort of antagonism was maintained between them, in which Lady Adelaide, from her position, of course obtained the best. Tiffle fanned the flame. Tiffle's prejudices had not softened with years; and her passive hatred of the boy had grown into active hatred of the man. Wilfred occupied himself listlessly with out-door sports—hunting, shooting, fishing, according to the seasons—and at length he took to spend his evenings at Miss Bordil-lion's.

It was well he did so; at least in one sense, for soon, very soon, the ennui was dissipated. The dispirited, listless young man, who had been ready to throw himself into the ponds instead of his fishing-line, and in truth cared little which of the two did go in, was suddenly aroused to

life, and hope, and energy. Far from the present time hanging about his neck like a millstone, it became to him as a sunny Eden, tinged with the softest rapture. The dim, indistinct future, so dark, so visionless to his depressed view, suddenly broke from its clouds, and shone out in colours of the sweetest and rosiest hue,—for he had learnt to love Edith Bordillion. Not with the unstable, fleeting nature of man's general love, but with a pure, powerful, all-absorbing passion, akin to that felt by woman.

They had not met for four years until he returned to Danesheld; never once had Wilfred visited it during his soldier's career. He had seen his father and Lady Adelaide occasionally in London, and had found that enough. So that he and Edith met almost as strangers. The pretty fairy, whom he had regarded as a sister, seemed altogether a different person; the present elegant young woman, and the former laughing familiar girl, were not the same.

A few months given to dreamy happiness, and then Wilfred spoke to Mr. Lester. The appeal perplexed Mr. Lester uncommonly. He could

have no objection to Edith; she was of as good family as his son (it may almost be said of the same), and there was no doubt she would inherit a snug fortune at the colonel's death, for she was his only child. Colonel Bordillion had been in India now for many years, spending little, and making money. What perplexed Mr. Lester was *his* share in the affair. Wilfred, in his eagerness, protested they could live upon nothing—as good as nothing. He did not wish to cripple his father; let him allow them ever so small an income, and they would make it suffice. Edith had said so.

“You are both of you a great deal too young to marry,” said Mr. Lester.

“I am twenty-three,” answered Wilfred.
“Edith is only two years younger.”

Lady Adelaide at first favoured the project. If Colonel Bordillion would allow them an income, and they could be content, poor creatures, with love in a cottage, why, let them marry: it would bring forth one great good—the departure for ever of Wilfred from the Hall. Cunningly she put this to Mr. Lester; not saying that she wished

to get rid of Wilfred; she had been always cautious on that point; and brought Mr. Lester into her way of thinking. He spoke to his son.

"But you'll allow me something, surely, sir," remonstrated the young man. "I cannot be indebted to my wife for everything, even though Colonel Bordillion were willing it should be so."

Mr. Lester fidgeted and grumbled. He was by no means of a mercenary nature, only he was so dreadfully hampered. He pointed out to his son how very little he could allow him; he'd try and manage a hundred and fifty pounds a year; it was the very utmost he could do. Wilfred had better write and explain to Colonel Bordillion why he, Mr. Lester, could not make it more, and he would see what the colonel said.

Wilfred took the advice, and while the colonel's answer was being waited for, he hired the tiniest and prettiest cottage in the world, and began putting into it a few trifling necessities of furniture. It was an exemplification of a young man's prudence, no doubt, but he did it: and meanwhile he and Edith lived on in their golden dreamland. Alas, alas! before the answer could quite come,

there arrived a letter from the colonel to Miss Bordillion. It hinted at some overwhelming calamity, but did not give particulars.

The next mail brought them. Colonel Bordillion was ruined. The Indian Bank, in which he had hoarded the savings of years, had failed. He did not know what dividend there would be, whether any: the affairs were in a state of dire confusion. A note was enclosed to Wilfred and Edith jointly, in which the colonel said he should have been delighted with the proposed union, and cordially have given them his blessing,—nay, would give it them still, could it be carried out; but of help, of money, he had none to give. If his old friend, Squire Lester, would make it right for them for a time, he might be able to do something later.

Wilfred Lester sat on in gloomy reverie, the letter in one hand, Edith's fingers imprisoned in the other. She was a bright-looking girl with golden hair.

“Would you mind trying it on two hundred a year, Edith?”

Edith's dimpled face broke into smiles. “I'll

do anything you ask me to do. Papa's sure not to be quite ruined, and he will help us later."

"Now, Edith, that's a promise: you'll do what I think best?"

"Yes, I will."

She had such perfect faith in Wilfred; she would have leaped with him blindfold into the deepest and darkest pit. The state of things at the Hall was fully understood at Miss Bordillion's, and that lady, Edith, and Maria Lester were in a secret flame of indignation against Lady Adelaide for her treatment of Wilfred.

Wilfred took the train for Scarborough, where Mr. Lester and his wife were temporarily staying. He placed Colonel Bordillion's letters in his father's hands, and asked what was to be done.

"It would be madness to marry now, Wilfred," was the hasty remark of Mr. Lester.

"I can't give her up, sir. I have been building upon the marriage these two months, night and day, and I—I must marry. I have been thinking that if you would increase the hundred and fifty you promised to two hundred, we might manage upon it until something turns up. Edith

is willing. There's plenty of game and plenty of fish, and house rent's cheap in Danesheld. Dear father! it is not much that I ask you. Do not refuse me! Remember your own early days."

He had taken his father's hand in his emotion. Mr. Lester looked up at the pleading face. It was one of delicate beauty, just as his own had been before care and grey hairs came to him; he saw the earnest entreaty of the deep blue eyes, and his own suddenly became dim, and his voice husky.

"It would be so terribly imprudent, Wilfred, I'm afraid. Think of Edith."

"I do think of her; I plead for her as well as for myself; Edith has been reckoning on the marriage as much as I have. You have said that you have no objection to her."

"Objection to Edith! Until to-day I have always thought you were in luck to get her. I should like to see you married to her at once, if the means would allow. Two hundred a year would be nothing."

"Not much for a permanency, but something is sure to turn up later. I shall get a post some-

time; and the colonel, it is to be hoped, will not lose all. Do not deny me, father."

"Well, Wilfred, I'll see what can be done," at length said Mr. Lester. "It will be terribly hazardous, though that is your own look-out; and how I shall contrive the two hundred I hardly know. When do you say you want to go back to Danesheld? to-morrow morning? I'll talk to you again, then, before you start."

Wilfred Lester looked upon it as settled, and felt himself upon a bed of roses. He met with a friend, a former brother officer who was staying at Scarborough, and the two fraternised together, and were altogether happy. But what was Wilfred's consternation the following morning when he was met by Mr. Lester with a freezing look and with still more freezing words. Upon considering the matter well over, he found the imprudence of such a step so great that he must withdraw all countenance to it.

Wilfred's eyes flashed.

"And you will allow me only the hundred and fifty, sir?"

"I will not allow you anything," said Mr.

Lester, coldly and calmly. "I am sorry to say that in the first flush of the subject yesterday I did not see the exceeding impropriety of the scheme. I cannot give my sanction to anything of the sort; for your sake as well as for Edith's, I cannot and ought not. I am going to write to Lord Irkdale to-day, Wilfred, and ask if he can't interest himself with the government for you. He has been useful to them of late, and perhaps they'll listen to him."

"Then Lord Irkdale may keep his application for himself," flashed the indignant young man, not over dutifully. "I know whence I am indebted for this change—it is to Lady Adelaide."

Reproach would do him no good; neither would Mr. Lester listen to it; and they parted in coldness. Wilfred went rushing to the hotel and poured out his wrongs to his sympathising friend; the officer, being a young officer and going to be married himself, was full of indignation, and he applauded Wilfred's expressed determination—to "marry Edith Bordillion in spite of it."

"I should do it myself," said the captain—"on my word and honour I should, Lester.

And, look here, if a fifty-pound note's of any good to you, I've got it with me, and you may borrow it for as long as you like."

Nobody need question about the acceptance of the offer. Wilfred Lester felt himself a rich man, and went back to Danesheld in triumph with a marriage license in his pocket, and openly claimed Edith's promise.

I am not going to defend either of them for the step they took. It was one of the most foolish that could be imagined. Miss Bordillion entreated against it, urging them to consider its terrible imprudence, if nothing else; and to wait at least until fresh news could arrive from Colonel Bordillion. Wilfred would not listen: a secret voice seemed to whisper to him that if he and Edith parted now they would be parted for years, perhaps for life; besides, as he represented to Edith—as he really thought—when once they were married, his father would come to, and allow him at worst the annual hundred and fifty pounds. And so the preparations went on; not for a positively secret marriage, but for one somewhat equivalent to it.

A few days, and the carriage of Mr. and Lady Adelaide Lester, which had been at the station waiting for them, dashed up to Danesheld Hall. It was a lovely September evening, and the slanting beams of the western sun fell on the bright face of the Lady Adelaide as she descended from it. A bright face still in colouring—the cheeks delicately blooming, the hair like silken threads of gold—but worn and weary in expression.

She went up at once to her chamber to dress for dinner, the French maid, Mademoiselle Celina, hastily throwing off her own travelling bonnet and shawl, and coming in to attend upon her in a great bustle and with profuse apologies. Would my lady vouchsafe to excuse that she was without a cap? A miserable accident had happened—she had lost the keys of her own boxes, and could not get at one; would my lady's goodness ever pardon it?

My lady did not appear to care whether Mademoiselle Celina had on a cap or not. She had been impatient to kiss her children, and was put out by finding them abroad with their nurses, and Lady Adelaide was not of a temper now to brook these trifles calmly.

"Make haste with my hair," she said, snappishly ; and it was the only answer she gave.

Celina had just finished the hair and put on the dress, when Tiffle entered. Tiffle had aged more than her lady ; but those shrivelled faces of ill-temper do age wonderfully quick. She had not forgotten her old habit of rubbing her mittened hands one over the other, and she came in, doing it, with her soft mincing step and her rich black silk gown.

"How could you send the children out when you knew I was expected, Tiffle?"

"My lady, that they are gone is thanks to somebody else, not to me," was Tiffle's answer. "I'm of no authority beside Miss Lester, and she came here this afternoon and told the nurse it was a shame to keep the children in this lovely afternoon, and she ordered them out. There, that will do ; I'll hand my lady her gloves and things."

The last sentence, delivered in a sharp accent, was addressed to Celina. Glad to be off, in search probably of her keys, the waiting-maid disappeared. Tiffle closed the door upon her and came back to

Lady Adelaide, her hands lifted, and the whites of her eyes turned up.

“Oh, my lady! the iniquity that has come to my knowledge this day? I have been turned inside out with indignation—if I may say as much—to think how you and the squire are being deceived. Those two mean-spirited weasels are going to get married on the sly.”

By intuition, as it seemed, Lady Adelaide knew of whom she spoke. Wilfred had been right in his surmise: it was his stepmother who had interfered and caused his father to withdraw all countenance from the marriage. Her motive was one of utter selfishness: she feared lest the new household should have to be supported by Mr. Lester; she begrudged the hundred or two a year it would take from her children, from her own extravagances.

“What are you saying, Tiffle?”

“My lady, it’s gospial true. Them two, Mr. Wilfred and Miss Bordillion’s fine niece, are going to get married underhanded. They are going to church by themselves alone, here in Danesheld; and of all the impudent acts I ever saw done,

that'll be about the most impudent. Here, in Danesheld, my lady!"

"Does Miss Bordillion countenance it?" breathlessly asked Lady Adelaide.

"She's capable of it," returned Tiffle, "but I've not heard so far. French leave they are going to take, and fine luck may it bring 'em! I can't come at the precise day, but I know it won't be long first. It may be to-morrow."

"How did you come at it at all?" asked Lady Adelaide. "How do you come at things?"

"I keep my eyes and ears open, my lady," answered Tiffle, her countenance wearing an expression of simple innocence.

"You must listen at doors, Tiffle; and behind hedges."

"My lady, whatever I do, it's done out of regard for your ladyship; that you should not be compressed in by a set of designing serpents. And I tell you for a truth that is truth—he is going to convert that young lady into Mrs. Wilfred."

"That can soon be stopped," said Lady Ade-

laide with composure. "Squire Lester will see to it. The gold bracelets."

"Begging your humble parden, my lady, it can't be so soon stopped. He is his own master, and she's of age. Squire Lester has got no more power over them—by force—than I have. They determinated to do this as soon as the ill news came from Injia, and they will do it."

There was a pause. Tiffle was clasping on the gold bracelets. Her fingers, it must be confessed, were deft enough. Presently she spoke, not looking up from the bracelets, the clasp of one appearing to have something wrong with it.

"Were it my case, my lady—not that I should presume to give advice, and I'm sure your ladyship knows that—I should just let it go on. If it's interfered with, there's no knowing what Squire Lester may be persuaded into; perhaps to giving them an illowance of hundreds and hundreds a year, to the wronging of your ladyship's self and the dear lambs. But when master comes to find that they have gone and done it themselves, in defiance of him, as may be said, then the fat'll be in the fire, my lady, and he won't look at them or

give them a farthing. And that'll be just what they deserve, and them sweet lambs won't be wronged."

The interview was interrupted by the lambs themselves. Noises were heard outside, and on the chamber door being opened they came trooping in. Lamb the first was a great boy turned eight, George, a troublesome lamb, and much indulged; lamb the last was a little one carried in its nurse's arms; and there were four others intervening. Lady Adelaide was nearly smothered for a few minutes, and Tiffle withdrew. Tiffle, as a taste, had the greatest possible aversion to lambs; but Tiffle dissembled in favour of these.

It could scarcely be supposed that Lady Adelaide condescended to take the woman's advice; and yet in one sense she did take it, for not a word said she to her husband. The consequences were precisely what Tiffle foretold. Wilfred Lester was allowed to marry in peace, and a very fine thing Mr. Wilfred Lester thought he had achieved. But when the news reached the annoyed ears of Squire Lester, which it did not until the following day, then the consequences began. To use the

elegant simile of Tiffle, the fat *was* in the fire ; and the blaze went up to the skies.

Wilfred Lester had carved out a pretty little plan of going before his father with his young wife Edith, humbly to confess, and beseech condonation for the offence ; but Wilfred found himself forestalled. Again he felt sure that he was indebted to Lady Adelaide, as he had felt at Scarborough ; and in both cases was he right. Neither had she failed in this later instance to stir up Mr. Lester's anger to boiling-point.

A furious interview succeeded between father and son. Squire Lester hurled reproaches on the young man's head ; Wilfred retorted by sundry reflections, more pointed than polite, on his step-mother. When they parted, Mr. Lester had openly cast him off, and protested that he was glad to do it. He declared that Wilfred should have no further assistance from him whatever, in life or after death.

Down strode Squire Lester to Miss Bordillion's. Cliff Cottage was not situated near the sea, as might be supposed from its appellation, but was at the back of the Hall, beyond an angle of the wood.

He bounced into the pretty little drawing-room, where sat Miss Bordillion, a faded lady now, with silvered hair.

"Did you know of this mad escapade of Wilfred's, Margaret?"

"Yes, I did," she replied. "I said what I could against it, but it was of no avail."

"Said what you could against it!" retorted Mr. Lester, using a tone to Miss Bordillion that he had never used before. "Why did you not tell *me*? You knew I had come home the night before, I suppose? I think you must have been an accomplice."

"I did not know that you had come home. But if—"

"Did Maria go to church with them?" he thundered.

"No. But I was going to say," continued Miss Bordillion, "that if I had known you were at home, I believe I should not have put myself forward with the information. All that argument and persuasion could do, I did; beyond that, I did not think it was my place to interfere. I do not believe that even you would have succeeded

in stopping the marriage, for both were bent upon it. It is lamentably imprudent, of course. Putting that out of the question, I think a great deal may be said on both sides."

"Then, perhaps, as you have not interfered to prevent this when you might have prevented it, you'll keep them when they come to starvation, for that will be the end of it," retorted Mr. Lester, as he went out in a fume.

But for that loan of fifty pounds, Wilfred might never have ventured on the hazardous step. With gold in the palm, things look to a man all *couleur de rosé*. Part of the fifty pounds put a few more trifles into the pretty cottage, and the rest, the largest portion of it, set them going in house-keeping. Ah me ! if we could but see the future as we see the past !

Squire Lester continued implacable. When he met his son in the street he did not speak to him ; he looked straight out over the head of his daughter-in-law if he saw her coming. He would not forgive Miss Bordillion, and intercourse between the two houses ceased, except what was kept up by Maria. How long Mr. Lester would other-

wise have suffered his daughter to stay on with Miss Bordillion must remain a question, but he had her home immediately, and withdrew the income hitherto allowed with her. He forbid her to go near her brother's house, but he had not as yet forbidden her Miss Bordillion's.

In the spring of the next year, May, Mr. Lester and his wife departed for London, taking Maria for her presentation. She was presented by her stepmother, and tasted for the first time of that whirl, a London season. They returned to Danesheld in August; but during their sojourn in town they had met an old friend, who had been a stranger to them for ten years.

It was Lord Dane. Greatly to the wonder of Danesheld, somewhat to the discontent of Miss Dane, Lord Dane had never once visited his home since quitting it. It was ten years ago now. Ten years! Where he had spent them he could hardly have told, save that he had sojourned in nearly every unknown town in Europe, avoiding the frequented capitals, and in none of them very long. He laughingly said to the Lesters that this London season was his re-initiation into life. He

went down to Danesheld before they did, and was re-established in the Castle with a retinue of servants, and his sister for its presiding mistress, and had made his peace with the neighbourhood for his long absence ; all before their return. The only household, rich or poor, to which he had not penetrated in his free, affable way, was Wilfred Lester's. It might have been thought that the state of Mrs. Lester's health kept him away, for poor Edith was very ill ; a little baby had been born to her and died, and she could not recover her strength. Not so. When he and Wilfred first met, and Wilfred had gone up to him with outstretched hand and a glow of welcome on his handsome face, Lord Dane's manner seemed to give out a cold chill, though it's true he touched the hand with the tips of two of his fingers.

“ My father and her ladyship again,” thought Wilfred ; and again he was right. Mr. Lester and Lady Adelaide had given Lord Dane a woful account of Wilfred and his ill-doings, known and suspected.

What had the twelvemonth brought forth for Wilfred ? A great deal ; and most of it very sad,

very blameable. Danesheld was beginning to whisper curious tales of him : to say he was fast becoming one of its black sheep.

As long as the residue of the fifty pounds lasted, Wilfred Lester was happy as a prince, never repenting the deed he had done, or believing he ever could repent it. When the money failed he took to credit ; and when that failed—for there's sure to be a limit to it in these semi-hopeless cases, and there was to his, although he was Squire Lester's eldest son—then Wilfred began to taste a few of the bitters and annoyances of life on a reduced scale. It was currently believed that Mr. Lester had disinherited him ; indeed, Mr. Lester himself had not scrupled to say it, and people do not like to risk losing their money : where small shopkeepers are concerned, as was the case here, they cannot afford to lose it. And so the credit was stopped ; and Wilfred, in his resentment against things in general, was beginning not to care what he did, or what became of him, or what tales to his prejudice were circulated ; which is a dangerous state of mind to fall into. He had spent the summer chiefly in fishing ; and

some talked about unfair snares in the ponds ; and now that shooting had come in, Wilfred could not follow it for two reasons : one being that he had not the money to buy a license ; the other, that he had months ago pledged his gun.

No help whatever had come from Colonel Bordillion. He was not able to send it. In the last letter they received from him, he told them he was going down to some place with an indistinct name that had about twenty letters in it, and that nobody could read. It appeared to be a formidable journey ; and meanwhile, he said, it would be of no use their writing until his return to Calcutta ; of which he would send due notice.

And now I think I have told you as much of the doings of the ten years as you would care to know. Old events were nearly forgotten : Harry Dane and his sad death, and its undiscovered agent, the mortality succeeding it in the Dane family, with the unexpected succession of the present peer, had lapsed into the archives of bygone history ; children had become men and women since then ; men and women had gone on a decade towards the sere of life.

And Lord Dane was rising ever in public opinion and in honour. The Lord-Lieutenancy of the County was conferred upon him, the nobleman, who had held it since the death of the late Lord Dane, having just died. It had been held by the Danes for years and years, so that it had only come back to the present peer : the runagate peer who seemed to be winning golden opinions from all the world.

CHAPTER III.

LORD DANE HOME AGAIN.

It was stormy weather. The winds had been high ever since September came in, some ten days ago now; and they appeared to be gathering strength and strength. Never had a wilder or more ominous day been experienced than the one now passing; never did the trees sway, as now, to the blast. The sun was setting with a lurid glare, the sea-gulls flew overhead with their harsh screams, the waves of the sea were tossing mountains high: signs that seemed to predict an awful night.

Maria Lester stood before the glass in her chamber, dressing for dinner. Rarely did glass give back a sweeter face. Her features were the Lester features, delicate and clearly defined, with a soft flush of damask on the cheeks, soft dark eyes,

and silky dark brown hair. She was of middle height, graceful and elegant, very quiet and unpretentious in manner.

People thought that so attractive a girl could not fail to marry early, if permitted. Maria was twenty years of age now, and had received one offer while she was in London. That is, Mr. Lester had received it for her, and he took upon himself to return a summary answer in the negative. Maria laughed when she heard of it, and felt much obliged to him. If permitted! The scandal talkers of Danesheld opined that she would not be permitted. Mr. Lester's high rate of expenditure, and his inadequate income to support such, were matters of public comment; little likelihood was there of his giving away his daughter when he must resign nine hundred a year with her!

A booming sound, more like a great gun going off than a gust of wind, drew Maria to the window. She could catch a glimpse of the far sea, of its bubbling and boiling waves, and stood looking out. She wore a violet silk dress, quite plain, save that some narrow white lace edged its low

body and short sleeves. Suddenly her white arms and hands were raised impulsively in supplication.

“May God help all who are on the sea this night!”

Lady Adelaide was in the drawing-room in her costly and beautiful evening robe of white brocaded silk, gleaming with jewels, when Maria entered. The manner in which she attired herself for a quiet home evening without guests, had long ceased to appear absurd to the household: they had grown accustomed to it. Mr. Lester had encouraged this in their early marriage days, before embarrassment came upon him: possibly he felt its inconvenience now. Maria sat down unspoken to, feeling as she always felt, *not at home*: it was not much kind notice she received from Lady Adelaide. The eldest lamb, George, was lounging in an easy chair.

Mr. Lester and the announcement of dinner came together: their hour when at the Hall was early, six o'clock. He gave his wife his arm, and Maria followed. No guests were with them that evening, and the meal was soon over. Lady Adelaide had chosen that George should sit at the

dinner-table; she very often did choose it; and the boy, indulged and forward, allowed no one to be heard but himself. With dessert came two more of the lambs, and when the whole were well plied with good things, there was a lull in the noise.

Not in the wind. An awful gust swept past the windows, and Mr. Lester turned his head.

"How they will catch it at sea to-night!"

"I thought once the ponies would have gone over the cliff," said Lady Adelaide, languidly. "Ada, what's the matter? Have you eaten too much? Take her on your lap, Maria."

"Did you venture on the heights to-day?" asked Mr. Lester. "Not quite prudent, that, Adelaide."

"I soon came off them again when I found what the wind was," answered Lady Adelaide, with as much of a laugh as she ever cared to indulge in. "I suppose you got no shooting?"

"Impossible, in the face of that whirling blast. Dan came out equipped for it, though; I laughed at him. He said he should look in this evening, Adelaide."

She raised her brow quickly at the words, and a scowl passed across it. Smoothing it away, her voice assumed its usual listless tone.

"I should think the wind would keep him at home. Maria, is that child asleep?"

Maria Lester hastily looked down at the little girl she held; the child was nodding with a piece of cake in her hand, and her mouth full.

"It's time she was in bed," said Mr. Lester. "The wind has tired her: I know it has me. Take her up-stairs, Maria."

Gently gathering the little thing in her arms, not to disturb her, Maria went to the nursery. The head nurse sat undressing the youngest child; two more were on the carpet, crying and fractious.

"Look at this child, nurse! she fell asleep on my lap directly."

"Tiresome little monkey!" responded the nurse. "They all want to be undressed together, I think. Please to lay her down in the bassinet, miss."

"But where's Susan, this evening?" asked Maria, as she stooped over the berceaunette.

"Oh, Susan! What's the good of Susan for

evening work? I really beg your pardon, Miss Lester, for answering you like that," broke off the woman, as her recollection came to her, "but I am so put out with that Susan, and my temper gets so worried, that I forget who I'm speaking to. The minute the children are gone into desert, Susan thinks her time is her own, and off she goes, and will be away for two mortal hours, leaving me everything to do. I can't quit the nursery to go after her, and I may ring and ring for ever before she'll answer it. Celina used to come in and help me, but she has not this time."

"Where does Susan go?"

"She goes off somewhere. I have no more control over her, miss, than I have over that wind, that's tearing round the house as if it would tear it to pieces."

"But why do you not speak to Lady Adelaide?"

"I have spoken, but it is of no use. Susan makes her own tale good to my lady, and Tiffle upholds her. She's Tiffle's niece, and my belief is that Tiffle sends her out. The fact is, Miss

Lester, Tiffle is the real mistress of this house, and I don't care much who hears me say it. You tiresome little thing, don't cry like that! I'm going to take you directly."

Miss Lester went to the bell and rang it. It was not answered: though, in truth, she scarcely gave sufficient time, but rang again, a sharp, imperative peal. Of all the servants, who should appear then but Tiffle. She came in, loudly abusing the nurse, and asking what she wanted that she should ring the house down.

"It was I who rang," curtly interrupted Miss Lester. "I rang for Susan."

Tiffle stood still and held her tongue, somewhat taken aback. Her manner smoothed down to meekness—false as it was subtle.

"For Susan, miss! Does nurse want her? I have just sent her out to do a little errand for me, thinking the young ladies and gentlemen were in the dining-room, and that she couldn't be required in the nursery. I'll send her up the moment she comes in, miss."

"You see that she is wanted, Tiffle," gravely replied Miss Lester. "Here are three children,

all requiring to be undressed at once, and it is impossible for one pair of hands to do it. Nurse tells me that Susan makes a point of being away at this hour. I shall speak to Lady Adelaide."

"Begging your pardon, Miss Lester, there's no necessities for that, and it will do no good. My lady has inlimited confidence in me and in Susan."

"That may be, Tiffle, but it is right she should know that the children are neglected. Send Celina here to assist the nurse until Susan shall return."

The tone was imperative. Maria, gentle though she was, yet possessed that quiet, nameless power of command which few care to resist. Tiffle stood aside as she left the room, and then Tiffle shuffled on in her wake, her eyes glancing evil.

Miss Lester passed into her own chamber. She stood at its window, contemplating the weather, listening to the howling wind. The sun had set, but the remains of light lingered brightly in the western sky, and the moon was rising. It could scarcely be called twilight yet.

“I think I may venture to go,” soliloquised Maria. “In my long dark cloak I can brave the wind. I *must* see Margaret; I must ask her if she has heard anything of this report, which is turning my heart to sickness. Papa asked me at dinner why I did not eat. How can I eat with this dreadful fear about me? Yes, I will go; I would go, were it only to escape Lord Dane.”

She tied on a close straw bonnet, wrapped her cloak securely round her, and went softly downstairs. A man-servant was in the hall as she passed through it. It was a small, angular hall, various rooms opening from it. Most of the apartments in the house were old-fashioned, except the drawing-rooms; they were charming, their side-windows opening to the grounds.

“James,” said Miss Lester, as the man opened the hall-door for her, “should any inquiries be made for me, say that I have gone to take tea with Miss Bordillion.”

When Mr. Lester communicated to his wife the fact that Lord Dane might be expected that evening, the passing scowl her brow assumed did

not escape his notice, and he spoke of it as soon as the children had left the room—spoke somewhat abruptly.

“Have you taken a prejudice against Lord Dane, Adelaide?”

“A prejudice against Lord Dane! I!”

“It has seemed to me, once or twice of late, that you have looked annoyed upon finding he was coming here.”

“Oh dear no! Lord Dane’s coming or staying away is nothing to me,” she answered, subsiding with an effort into her usual languor of indifference, and turning away her still beautiful face, to hide its flush of crimson.

“I don’t wonder at his being fond of dropping in here,” observed Mr. Lester. “The Castle must be very dull for him with no companion but poor silly Cely. As your cousin——”

“He is no cousin of mine,” she interrupted.

“Strictly, no; but he may almost be called one. And you know, wife of mine, you are given to be capricious on occasion.”

“Capricious! Yes, I think I am. When you married me, George, you married me with all my

faults and failings, remember. I don't suppose they have lessened with years."

"Dane has not given you any offence, then?"

"None in the world. How that wind howls and shrieks! We shall have an awful night."

The conversation took another turn, and by-and-by Lady Adelaide went into the drawing-room. Only one of the rooms was lighted to-night; but it was a spacious room, furnished with all imaginable elegance, and not crowded with encumbering things—monsters, jars, china tea-cups, and other useless ornaments, as some rooms are.

She did not sit down; she walked about restlessly: now lifting a most beautiful rose from its slender glass of crystal; now glancing at the title of a new uncut book; now standing before the pier glass, which reflected herself. Not, as it seemed, to admire her own charms—more in dreamy thought.

There were times when the life, present and past, of the Lady Adelaide, showed itself to her in its true, miserable colours. The marrying Mr. Lester was a mistake, as Lord Dane once told her it would be; and she did her best to run away out

of it. She did her best to run away from some other haunting phantom that was ever following her, more or less ; very close indeed did it seem to-night. A dream, of what might have been, came over her ; now, as she stood there, with her fair and jewelled hand pushing back the shining flaxen hair from her brow. Had fate been kinder, *she* might have been kinder ; might have grown to love her fellow-creatures ; to try to please God, if ever so poorly ; to have lived a little in this world as one who is striving for the next : whereas she had steeled her heart to all loving impulses ; she had grown hard and more hard, selfish and more selfish, false and very false.

A slight noise at the door, and she turned with a frightened start, glancing over her shoulder with that scared look, at such moments observable in her ; just as if she feared her pursuing phantom was coming in bodily. But it was only Tiffle who entered ; entered with much softness, and smoothing over of hands, and penitential deprecation for the intrusion.

“ My lady, with a thousand pardons for venturing to interrupt you here, I thought I'd

make bold to ask whether you'd not like a fire in your dressing-chamber. The wind gets higher and higher."

"A fire! No, I think not: it is warm. I don't care either way."

"Then I shall have one lighted, for I think it will be more comfortable for your ladyship," said Tiffle, her knees going down in a sort of curtsey as she turned to the door. But instead of going out of it, she looked round again.

"There's news abroad to-night that the keeper's dying—if your ladyship will excuse my waiting to mention it. And, my lady," added the woman, dropping her voice, "the slender one, out with the others, *was* Mr. Wilfred Lester. It mayn't be pleasant for any of the parties, my lady, if Cattley dies."

"Tiffle, I cannot altogether believe that story," said Lady Adelaide, coming from before the glass and seating herself on a sofa, with her face bent on the servant. "He would never run his neck into such a noose as that. Why, it would be transportation, at the least! The more I think of it, the less I can believe it; and for Heaven's sake

be cautious in speaking, and don't let it come to the ears of Mr. Lester. You must have found a mare's nest."

"My lady—craving your pardon—are the nestesses I have already found mares' nestesses?" demanded Tiffle, with just the least acrimony in her vinegar face. "When I told you that those two deep ones were going to ignite themselves together in matrimony, did that turn out a mare's nest, my lady? or did the information I brought you a week ago, that he did go abroad at night with a gun, though it's well known his gun is in the pawnshop? And—not to go to other instances, which perhaps may be called to mind—I must beg leave to say that I know my place too well, and what is due to your ladyship too well, to mention any news which I'm not sure and certain of, or any tales that could devolve into mares' nestesses."

"But, Tiffle, how do you get at the knowledge of these things? You must keep a detective at work."

"The detective is my own good eyes and ears, my lady, which is being exorcised always in behalf

of them sweet cherrybims, the lambs up aloft, now sleeping in their warm little beds. Leave Mr. Wilfred and Miss Lester to their own dervices, and they'd run rough shod over 'em. Never, while I've got eyes to see and a tongue to tell."

Her mistress slightly lifted her hand, as a hint that it was sufficient, and Tiffle shuffled out with a curtsy. Lady Adelaide threw herself back in a chair, and fell into a soliloquy.

"What can be the reason that it should have come back to me? Ten years! ten long, weary years; surely it was long enough to live it down! Is it since I have seen *him* again that the haunting fear has reasserted itself? No: for I found it not in London, and there we saw him as much as we do here. It has come upon me since I returned to Danesheld; it is upon me to-night worse than it has ever been: a miserable conviction that the past is going to be raked up again; a dread fear that my sin——"

"Lord Dane, my lady."

The announcement was Tiffle's. A terrific gust had blown the outer door open, and his lordship and the wind had entered together,

meeting Tiffle in the hall. He was altered far more than Lady Adelaide. Could it be that the tall, stern man of eight and thirty, with some grey hairs mingling with his luxuriant locks, and the lines of care upon his broad white brow, was the whilom slender stripling of only ten years ago? But he was a very handsome man now, handsomer than he used to be, with the high Dane features and the proud carriage of the Dane family. As to the lines, what brought them on *his* brow? Of distinguished position, of great wealth—for his coffers had been accumulating since he went abroad—possessed of all the extraneous accessories to render life happy, one might indeed wonder how the care got into Lord Dane—as one does of the flies in amber.

She stood up to receive him, in her white brocaded dress, in her glittering jewels, in her conscious beauty. Very many times had they met of late; but Lord Dane, as he greeted her to-night, could not help thinking how little she was changed: almost as attractive did she look as she had done in the time when she was his young love. There was no peevishness on her face now.

“What a terrible night!” she exclaimed, as she reseated herself, and Lord Dane drew a chair near to her.

“Ay, indeed; and blowing right on the coast,” he answered. “I trust we shall have no disasters at sea.”

“Did you walk here?”

“Walk? oh yes, it is not so far.”

“I was thinking of the weather.”

“Oh, I have become inured to that, whatever it may be. My nine or ten years’ travel did that good service for me.”

“I had used to wonder what kept you abroad so long—what the attraction could be. But you did not remain long in one place.”

“I went everywhere; everywhere in Europe; not out of it. Except—yes—except that I explored Turkey in Asia.”

“And your attraction, I ask, Lord Dane?”

“I had none. The very restlessness would imply the want of that. I wandered hither and thither, believing that I should never again have an object in life; certainly never an attraction.”

“A rash belief—at your age, with life almost

all before you," she remarked, speaking with an assumption of arch gaiety.

"Well, yes: since I have lived to find its fallacy."

"In what manner?"

"I came back to England, caring very little whether I came or whether I stayed away from it for good. And, very soon after my return, the old dead fibres of my heart, that I thought had withered to the roots, sprang again into vitality. It was here, at home, that I met with an attraction; an object in life that I believe will remain with and influence me for ever."

She lifted her eyes inquiringly towards him, and Lord Dane continued:

"When the consciousness of this first dawned upon me, I strove to combat it by every effort in my power; but the more I strove, the less would it take its departure, and I had no resource but to yield to it. It has become my master, influencing every action of my life, present with me by night and by day. On my sacred word of honour, I thought it was over for me, this love; that my heart and I had alike grown out of it; that 'the

song had left the bird.' I feel half ashamed of myself to confess to it now."

She gave a slight start and sat more upright in her chair, her cheek flushing, her eyes gazing at him in every astonishment through their half-closed lashes. Lord Dane drew his chair nearer, and seemed somewhat agitated.

"I have been thinking of speaking to you these two or three weeks; but, I honestly avow I have not liked to do it. If for an instant I have been alone with you, and would have rushed on my confession, a nameless feeling that perhaps you will understand, a sudden distaste for the task, has intruded itself and held me back. But as I walked down here to-night, I made a vow that I would enter upon it, if opportunity were granted. Forgive me for it; forgive me what I would ask of you: that your own heart should plead my cause. Adelaide—again forgive me, if I speak to you with the familiarity of former years—if you will be my advocate, my suit cannot fail."

He spoke in the low tender tone that had once been as the sweetest music in her ear; he took her hand between his in his pleading earnestness.

Will you excuse Lady Adelaide for the error into which she fell?—with the remembrance of old days so vividly just then upon her, it was perhaps a natural one. She thought he was pleading for *her* favour, not for her influence with another. A powerful emotion ran through her frame : it was succeeded by a sort of deadly coldness.

“Have you forgotten who I am?” she asked in a low, proud tone, not so much in resentment, but as though she thought he really had forgotten it. “You forget yourself, Lord Dane : I am the wife of Mr. Lester ; the mother of his children.”

Lord Dane dropped her hand ; and an involuntary laugh broke from him before he could check it. Something in its tone jarred upon her ear.

“When you threw me away to marry George Lester, Lady Adelaide, I fully understood that I was thrown away for ever. Believe me, I accepted the alternative there and then, as a fate irrevocable. I have never presumed to think that I could find favour with you again, under any circumstances or contingency whatever, that the chances of the world might bring about. I beg

your pardon a thousand times for having expressed myself badly, as I conclude I must have done. I was but asking for your good offices in my behalf with your step-daughter, Maria Lester."

A burning suffusion of passionate shame dyed the brow of the Lady Adelaide. Never did woman fall into a more humiliating error. She could have struck herself for her vain folly ; she could have struck Lord Dane. When she opened her lips to speak, no sound would come. He had been honest, at any rate : he had not given a thought to the possibility of his words being so misconstrued : his mind was full of Maria Lester ; and Lady Adelaide was no more to him, and never had been since her marriage, than any other man's wife. He had then thrust her out from his heart for ever, whatever she might have done by him. A thought crossed her that this humiliating, bitter mistake of hers must have three parts repaid him for all she had made him suffer in the days gone by.

He was good-natured, and strove to put her at her ease ; telling her, in a matter-of-fact tone, that he wished to marry Miss Lester ; and that

his chief motive in speaking first to herself was, that she might use her influence with her husband.

“People say to me that it is time I settled,” he observed: “and of course it is time, if I am to settle at all. In addition to any predilection I may have formed, I have begun to see that it will be better for me: poor Cecilia is not much of a companion. But before I found out this, indeed before I came down to the Castle, or had left London, I had made up my mind in regard to Miss Lester. I never met any one whom I so thoroughly esteemed,” he added, with an emphasis on the last word, “and I trust to induce her to become Lady Dane. Hence I come to you, as one old friend will go to another, to enlist your interest on my behalf with Miss Lester.”

The past had become clear to her. She *had* wondered what brought Lord Dane so often to their house: perhaps had set it down within her own breast to a very different motive. Her face burnt still; but she strove to throw off her shame defiantly, and drew up her head with a haughty gesture.

“Why do you not apply to Mr. Lester instead of to me, Lord Dane?”

Lord Dane explained why, in the most delicate manner possible. In common with all Danesheld, he knew that the prospect of having to relinquish his daughter's fortune would act as an almost insuperable barrier to Mr. Lester's giving his consent to any marriage proposed for her. Lord Dane, however, wished for Maria alone, not for her fortune; that could remain with Mr. Lester: the settlement he offered would be ample, and obviate the necessity for Mr. Lester's relinquishing the other. It was *this* he had wished to tell to Lady Adelaide; for Mr. Lester's sensitiveness on pecuniary matters was well known, and he might receive the communication better from his wife than from the suitor.

The thought was a generous one. Lady Adelaide could but feel it so; and some of her coldness of manner melted down.

“Legal help can of course be called in to ratify the arrangement,” observed Lord Dane. “You will be my advocate with them both, will you not, dear Lady Adelaide?”

Lady Adelaide made no immediate reply. Some stifling weight seemed to oppress her, and she rose from her seat suddenly, in agitation that she could not wholly hide, drew aside the window curtains, and stood peering forth into the boisterous night. Lord Dane watched her. Was her strange manner caused by any lingering remains of regard for him, he mentally questioned? or was she angry with herself for the unfortunate misapprehension, and with him for causing it?

"Maria is too young for you, Lord Dane," presently came her voice from the window; but she did not turn.

"That is a question—I beg your pardon, Lady Adelaide—surely that is a question that may be left with herself and me."

"You are double her age."

"Not quite."

There was a long pause, broken at length by Lady Adelaide:

"I would prefer to remain neuter in this affair, Lord Dane," she said, returning to her seat. "If I do not second your efforts to gain Miss Lester, I will at least not impede them."

Apply yourself direct to Mr. Lester ; speak to him with the considerate candour that you have now spoken to me, and I am sure he will hear you. It is true that he is sensitive on pecuniary points ; circumstances, chiefly those connected with his son, have made him so. He must decide for himself. Maria is his daughter, not mine ; and I will not interfere. Your suit must progress, or the contrary, unbiassed, uninterfered with by me."

" You will not be against me ?"

" I have said so. My position in regard to it shall be one of strict neutrality."

Lord Dane bowed. In his inmost heart he had suspected she would have been against him in this—against Maria ; and this secret fear no doubt swayed him to speak to her first, and endeavour to make sure of her interest. Perhaps she conceded as much as he had expected she would.

" Is Miss Lester at home this evening ?"

" Yes ; but I don't know where she has got to," replied Lady Adelaide, ringing the bell. " Tell Miss Lester she is being waited for in the draw-

ing room," she added to the man who answered it.

"Miss Lester is gone out, my lady."

"Out! On this turbulent night!"

"She went directly after dinner, my lady. She told me to say that she was gone to take tea at Miss Bourdillion's."

"Maria does do things that nobody else would think of," cried Lady Adelaide, as the servant closed the door. "The idea of her going abroad such a night as this!"

"Some urgent motive must have taken her," observed Lord Dane, who felt surprised himself.

"The urgent motive of her own whim; or possibly a promise to that antiquated piece of propriety, Miss Bordillion," scornfully returned Lady Adelaide. "I wonder Mr. Lester does not forbid Maria's going there, after the countenance shown by the woman to her niece and Wilfred Lester at the time of their marriage. By the way, an association reminds me to ask after your keeper. I hear he is dying."

"No, he is not dying. I hope he will get

better even now. He was going on very well until this morning, when the police called at his house and subjected him to a cross-examination. I wish they'd be less eager to interfere, those fellows. Cattley was not in a state for it."

"Has it been fully decided who his attackers were?"

"Not at all. Cattley holds a suspicion as to two of them, but he cannot swear to it; and the police may spare their pains. That is how these offenders get off, Lady Adelaide."

"I fancy you are inclined to be very lenient."

Lord Dane laughed: he hardly knew whether he was or not, and really did not care. "Is Mr. Lester in the dining-room?" he asked.

"I suppose so: I left him there. He must have dropped asleep."

With just a word of apology, Lord Dane left her, and went in search of Mr. Lester, whom he found. Not in the dining-room, but in a small room at the back of the hall, called the study. He was seated at his desk-table, a heap of papers before him, his spectacles on—which he had lately had to take to at night—and his face full of anxious

care. Lord Dane sat down, and quietly asked him for his daughter, hinting at the arrangement he had mentioned to Lady Adelaide.

But for that one troublesome impediment, Mr. Lester would have jumped at the offer. It was a better one than he had ever expected would fall to the lot of Maria. He sat perplexed in thought, giving no reply. It was impossible for him to resign her fortune on the one hand ; on the other he felt it equally impossible to accept any such arrangement as that proposed by Lord Dane. Mr. Lester had always been a sensitive man in regard to his neighbours' opinion and the world's, and it occurred to him to ask what would be said of him if he permitted this.

"Surely you do not object to me, Mr. Lester ? I can offer for your daughter the most ample settlements ; and I love her as I never thought to—to love any one."

"I thank you for your offer, Lord Dane ; it does us honour ; but these things require mature deliberation. Will you allow me a week or ten days to consider of it ?"

"So long as that !"

"You would rather have that than an immediate negative?"

"Yes. But why a negative?"

"Indeed I am not prepared to discuss it now," said Mr. Lester, rising. "You must give me my own time for consideration, and say nothing to Maria. Let us join Lady Adelaide."

He gave a glance at his scattered papers, blew out the shaded sperm light he had been writing by, and locked the door upon his room of care. At the same moment the hall-door was opened and Maria was blown in, her bonnet in her hand.

"Oh, papa, it is such a night!" she exclaimed, half laughing at the breathless state she was in, and the disorder of her petticoats. "My veil has been carried clean away, and I was lucky to save my bonnet. See at my hair. Is that Lord Dane? don't look at me."

Mr. Lester stared, as well he might, and asked what in the world had taken her abroad.

"I did not think it was so bad, papa. I went to Miss Bordillion's. • She would not let me stop, and sent me home again between Mary and the old

gardener. *I should like to see how they'll get back ; the wind grows worse with every minute."*

Laughing at the reminiscence, throwing her cloak and bonnet on a bench in the hall, Maria smoothed back her hair, and went into the drawing-room, on the ready arm of Lord Dane.

CHAPTER IV.

SPARING SUGAR AND BUTTER.

WHEN a writer has opposite incidents to relate referring to the same period of time, he is often puzzled which to take up first. Miss Lester had walked forth after dinner in the wild night—leaving the Lady Adelaide to her remarkable interview with Lord Dane—and was speedily blown back again by the wind: but, short as her absence abroad was, there's something to tell of it.

Skirting the Hall round to the right, as it were, Miss Lester struck into a somewhat lonely road: the pastures belonging to her father's house were on the right, the dark wood on her left. She was on her way to Miss Bordillion's, and there were two roads that would take her to it: the one she was pursuing, the other through an angle of the wood. The wind nearly took her off her feet, but she bore

up bravely, seizing hold ever and anon of the trunk of a tree to steady herself. The opening to the wood was soon reached, and she turned into it, as being the most sheltered. It was not yet dark, or she would have chosen the open road; but, to people born and bred in the country, fear abroad is almost unknown.

Nevertheless, as she went swiftly along the narrow path, the gloom did strike upon her unpleasantly. The wind did not impede her progress here, but it moaned and shrieked over-head, seeming to shake the trees to their very centre, and imparting a weird-like, ghostly loneliness to the scene. Maria began thinking of a certain story she had read in German, where a maiden was speeding through one of the country's dense forests, and——

Some object suddenly started out from the trees before her, and she positively screamed. The next moment, however, she burst out laughing. It was only her brother. A tall and very slender man of four and twenty, with the same delicately-beautiful face he had in boyhood: the dark blue eyes, the long eyelashes, the dark hair. But the joyous,

impulsive manners of the boy had given place to an indifference that bordered upon apathy: some such a manner as might be seen in one out of conceit of the world, and who has nearly given himself over to despair.

"How stupid I am!" exclaimed Maria, alluding to her cry. "But you should not have startled me, Wilfred."

"I did not intend to startle you. Who was to think you would be in the wood to-night? It's not the thing, Maria."

"The night has not come yet. I am going to Margaret's, and chose this way as being more sheltered. I could not keep my legs in the road."

He had turned to walk by her side. Maria seemed under some timid restraint; and cast a stealthy glance at the gun in his hand to make sure it was one.

"Is that your gun, Wilfred?" she at length asked.

"It's one I have had lent me," he replied in a short tone; and there ensued a silence. Five hundred doubts and questions arose to Maria's lips, but she did not dare to speak them.

"I wonder they let you come abroad such a night as this," he presently said. "I never remember such a one."

"I did not ask leave; I came without. How is Edith?"

The question was put in a hesitating voice. Wilfred took it up. His mind was in that state of ultra sensitiveness that warfare with the world frequently entails.

"What! I suppose it is high treason to inquire after her! Have they forbidden you even her name? Come, Maria, confess; you cannot tell more than I suspect."

Maria was silent.

"Perhaps they have interdicted your speaking to me if we happen to meet?" he pursued.

"No, Wilfred, they have not done that yet. Tell me how you are getting on. Is Edith better?"

"We are not getting on at all; unless going backwards is getting on. It is backwards with us generally, and backwards with Edith. She will never grow strong while things are as they are. If there's justice in Heaven——"

"Hush, Wilfred! It will do no good."

"And no harm. But have it as you like, Maria. The next interdiction will be, I suppose, against your speaking to me."

"Should it come, Wilfred, it will be partly your own fault," she answered.

"No doubt of it. I am all in fault, and they are all in the right. But I did not expect to hear *you* say it."

"You are petulant with me without a cause, Wilfred. You know that I care for you more than for any one in the world. I fear I do not care even for papa—though it may be wicked of me, and wrong to say it—as I care for you."

"It would be a wonder if you cared much for him," cried bold Wilfred. "He has not allowed us to care for him. Exclusively occupied as he has been with his lady-wife and her children, showing neither common care nor affection for you and me——"

"I don't think we ought to speak of it," came the gentle interruption.

Wilfred gave a sort of aggrieved jerk to his velveteen shooting-coat, and disdained an answer.

"You speak of the possibility of our intercourse being forbidden; I say that, if it is, the fault will be yours, Wilfred," she added, gathering courage for a desperate effort. "What are these tales that are being whispered about you?"

"Tales?"

"That you are taking to ill courses; to poaching for game and fish; to going out at night with loose men. They are"—she stopped with a slight shiver, and then went on rapidly—"talking of the attack on Lord Dane's keeper."

"The country for ten miles round is talking of nothing else," returned Wilfred, carelessly.

"But they say—some say—that you were one of them."

"Oh, they do, do they! It's well my back's rather broad just now. Who says it?"

"I don't know."

"Who said it to you?"

"The rumour has come into the Hall in some way. I fancy through Tiffle. Lady Adelaide said a word or two to me, and it turned me sick and faint. I was too terrified to ask a single question; and if I had, perhaps she'd not have ans-

wered it. Oh, Wilfred, come to the Hall and deny it if you can! deny it to papa, and get him to stop the rumours."

"If I can?—what do you mean, Maria? Do you think I go out at night to murder game-keepers?"

"Then you will come to the Hall and explain," was the eager rejoinder.

"Not if I know it. The Hall has been forbidden to me. Don't trouble yourself, Maria; Lady Adelaide and Tiffle can say what they like; my back is broad enough, I tell you."

"They talk of gins and snares; of the entrapping game wholesale for sale," she shivered.

"I see; they make me into a regular poacher. Well, Maria, let my father and his wife enjoy the scandal. Were I to get hung or transported, they'd have the satisfaction of knowing that they drove me on the way."

Maria Lester pressed her hands on her chest as if she could still the pain working there. She felt herself so very helpless. On the one hand, were her harsh stepmother and the husband whom she swayed; on the other, this brother

being driven to desperation: the brother whom she so loved.

"How does my father think I am to live, Maria, when he does not give me anything to live upon? Put Edith out of the question—Margaret supplies her—had I not married, surely he must and would have allowed me something, if only a hundred a year. Let him, in justice, give me that now. I believe that they wish me to go wrong. I am sure Lady Adelaide does."

"You are out to-night with that gun, Wilfred."

"And, if I am, I can't use it in this wind."

"But only the carrying of it may be brought against you. You have no game licence."

"Yes I have."

For a single moment she thought he was uttering an untruth, and her countenance fell.

"I have taken one out; Margaret helped me."

To hear this was like a weight lifted from her heart, for more reasons than one. She was about to reply, when a movement amidst the thick trees attracted her attention, and she halted in a sort of fear.

"What was it?" she whispered, pointing to the place.

"I heard nothing except the wind."

"I did not hear—I saw," answered Maria. "Some face was peering out there at us, and I saw it drawn back. It was like a boy's face."

Wilfred Lester strode to the spot indicated, pushing himself amidst the trees. Not any creature was in sight, human or inhuman: but there was a narrow path striking off further into the wood, favourable to escape.

"I think you must have been mistaken, Maria."

She shook her head, and they soon came to the end of the wood. Further on, on the open road, was the residence of Miss Bordillion; to the left, a by-way led to the cottage inhabited by Wilfred. It was close by, though an angle of the road hid it from view. As they stood a moment, Wilfred telling Maria that she had better go back home, and not venture further in the howling wind, a very curious-looking boy came running past. Slim to a degree, with restless wriggling movements, he was not unlike a

serpent: he had that old, precocious face sometimes seen in the deformed, and sly, sly eyes. Not that he was deformed, only very stunted for his years, which were near fifteen. An ordinary spectator might have thought him ten.

“Hallo, Shad! where are you scuttering off to?” cried Mr. Wilfred Lester.

The boy stopped. Rejoicing in the baptismal name of Shadrach, he had never, in the memory of the neighbourhood, been called anything but Shad. His other name nobody knew; and it did not clearly appear that he had one. Nearly fifteen years ago he was first seen, a baby, at the hut of old Goody Bean. She said he was her daughter's, who had been many a year away from home; but Goody Bean was not renowned for veracity, and on the whole did not get credence as to this assertion of the child's parentage. To whomsoever he belonged, there he had been from that time to this.

“Please, sir, I'm a going home. I've been getting some sticks for granny.”

He spoke with childlike simplicity; but, look-

ing at his sharp face, it might be doubted whether the simplicity was not put on. It was one of two things: that he was a very unsophisticated young gentleman, or else one of rare and admirable cunning.

"Have you been in the wood to get those, Shad?" demanded Miss Lester, looking at the few bits of faggots in the boy's hand.

"I've been o'ny on t'other side the hedge, miss; I don't like the wood when the trees moans and shakes."

"Have you *not* been in the wood?" she returned, looking keenly at him.

"I was there yesterday, miss."

"I spoke of this evening."

"No," he said, shaking his head from side to side, something like the trees. "Granny telled me to go into the wood, and bring her a good bundle o' sticks, but I wouldn't when I heard the wind; and I expec's a whacking for it."

He shamled off. Miss Lester turned to her brother. "Wilfred, it was he who was watching us."

"Very likely. He is even less worthy of

credit than his grandmother; and that's saying a great deal. Why! what does *she* want?"

A decent-looking woman, with a sour face, was turning the angle of the path with a quick step. Wilfred knew her for his servant: the moment she saw her master her pace increased to a run, and she called out to him in some alarm.

"What now, Sally?" quoth he. "Is the house on fire?"

"Sir," responded Sally, grimly, "the house is not on fire; but my mistress is lying in a dead faint, and I ran out to look for you. I'm not sure but life has at length left her."

A moment's bewildered hesitation and Wilfred started off; but he had not gone many yards when he arrested his steps and turned to his sister.

"Will you not come also, in the name of humanity? Your entering my house to say a word of comfort to Edith—dying as she may be, as I fear she is, for the want of countenance, of kindness—will not poison Mr. and Lady Adelaide Lester. Judge between me and them, Maria."

It might have been the ring of bitter mockery

in his tone ; it might have been, as he put it, her own humanity that prevailed ; any way, Maria followed. The cottage was near at hand : a very unpretending cottage indeed, skirting the wood, the kitchen facing the front road, the sitting-room at the back. Edith was in the latter, lying as Sally had left her.

It was only a fainting-fit, and she was already reviving when they entered. Fainting-fits had been rather common with Edith since her illness, but the usually staid servant Sally (her baptismal name, though people sometimes called her Sarah from a dim notion of being polite) had for once got frightened. Maria, interdicted from going to her brother's, had not seen his wife for many, many weeks, nay for months : she stood over Edith, shocked at the change there was in her, and fully believing she could not be long for this world. Maria burst into tears as she kissed her ; they both cried together ; and Wilfred whispered to his sister that he was afraid of the agitation for Edith. So Maria said a word of quiet farewell, and withdrew.

"Sally," she impulsively began to the maid in

the kitchen, "whatever has reduced your mistress to this shocking state?"

"Famine, more than anything else," was the answer, given in the woman's customary blunt way.

"Famine!" repeated Maria, staring at the speaker in a shock of bewilderment, and feeling ready to faint herself. "*Famine!* Things cannot be so bad here as that."

"They are not much better, and haven't been for some time, so far as she is concerned," was Sally's answer, with a jerk of her head towards the parlour door: and if the woman spoke more familiarly than was consistent with the respect due to Miss Lester, it might be set down partly to her natural manner, partly to the fact that she had formerly been nurse to Maria and Wilfred. She had also more recently lived as housemaid with Miss Bordillion, and waited on Edith and Maria when they were girls. "Me and master, we can eat hard food; bread and cheese, or bread and bacon, or a bit o' meat and a heap o' potatoes and onions made into an Irish stew, and we can wash it down with water, and thrive upon it. But she

can't ; she could no more swallow them things than she could swallow the saucepans and Dutch ovens they're cooked in. When folks are delicate and weak in health, they require delicate food. Beef-tea, and jellies, and oysters, and a bit o' chicken, or a nice cut out of a joint of meat, with a glass or two of good wine every day ; that's what Miss Edith wants. And she's just going into her grave for the lack of it."

The parlour door opened, and Wilfred's voice was heard down the passage. "Sally, is Miss Lester gone? If she'll wait an instant, I'll see her safe to Miss Bordillion's."

Maria laid her finger on her lips. "Don't tell him I'm here, Sally," she breathed. "He shall not leave his poor wife to come out with me."

"Miss Lester's all right, master," was the response, delivered with the usual crustiness.

"Then step here, Sally. Your mistress wants you."

Sally obeyed the summons, and Maria took the opportunity to steal away. As she ran along to Miss Bordillion's—that is, ran as well as the wind

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would permit her—she felt as perhaps she had never before felt in her whole existence. Suffering from lack of proper food!—dying from it! Maria Lester had read of such things in fiction and sometimes in the newspapers; but to have such brought palpably before her, and in her own class of life, had certainly not been amidst her past experiences. Two convictions gradually forced themselves uppermost from the chaos of thought: the one that an awful responsibility lay in some not very defined quarter; the other, that she should be powerless to alter the state of things.

Cliff Cottage was soon reached: a small, pretty white house with green venetian blinds outside the windows. Miss Bordillion was a very gentle lady now, with a close cap and white hair. No trace of the heart-conflict she had done battle with was discernible on her smooth features—only on the hair: that had turned white before its time. She was surprised to see Maria come in; and looked up from the midst of her tea. Maria threw off her cloak and bonnet and sat down to the table; and the maid brought in a cup and saucer and some butter.

"Are you taking you tea without butter, Margaret?"

"I like dry toast sometimes, my dear."

But Maria remembered that Miss Bordillion never had liked dry toast; nay, that she had been rather particularly partial to butter: and she now saw her get up, and quietly, in a surreptitious sort of manner, take the sugar basin from the sideboard and place it on the table. A light, and a very uncomfortable one, dawned upon Maria.

"Is it famine here, Margaret?" she said, with emotion. "I have just heard it is, elsewhere."

An explanation ensued, for Maria was urgent. It was not famine, but it was very strict economy, an abstinence from all but absolute necessities. Since Maria and Edith quitted Miss Bordillion a year ago, she had been thrown upon her own resources: one hundred a year. It might have sufficed for comfort for her and her servant—and she kept but one now—but unfortunately she had also Wilfred and Edith on her hands.

"Are you helping *them*, Margaret?" exclaimed Maria.

"To what little extent I can. There is no one else to do it."

"I had no idea of it," breathed Maria. "Wilfred said a word to-night in allusion to it; but I thought I might have mistaken him, your income is so very small."

"My dear child, how do you suppose they have lived? No household can get along without *some* ready money. For some time after their marriage I would not see them, not choosing to countenance the imprudent step. Their money went—what they had of it; and then their few little personal valuables went; next their credit went; and there they were. One day I met Edith—it was about three months before the baby was born—and she looked so worn and weak that I gave her my arm home, and Sally enlightened me as to the state of things. That girl is worth her weight in gold."

"Who is?"

"Sally."

"Oh, Margaret! she was always the crossest old thing!" cried Maria, going back in thought to her and Edith's girlhood days, when Sally had tyrannised over the pair.

"She is iron in manner, gold at heart. She had a little money saved up," continued Miss Bordillion; "not much, for she has kept her mother and that bedridden sister; it was a few pounds only, and she spent them in necessities for Edith when the child came."

"I'll never call her cross again," said Maria, in a flush of repentance. "But, Margaret, don't you think Wilfred is being very ill-used? Surely the tradespeople might give him a little more credit!"

"He is already in their debt."

"To a trifling, paltry extent. But he is papa's eldest son. The estate must be his sometime."

"Must?"

The word was spoken with significant emphasis, and Maria's face flushed all over. It had touched a sadly sensitive chord in her secret heart.

"It would be so unjust to leave it away from Wilfred, Margaret!" she said, her voice falling to a whisper, as befitted the subject in her own mind, for it was one she had never dared to speak of. "He is the eldest; he was the only one for years,

until these others came. A great deal of papa's resources are from mamma: surely he will at least not leave *them* away from Wilfred!"

"The tradespeople do not appear to think there's much certainty either way," observed Miss Bordillion, in a constrained tone.

"You won't speak of this to me, Margaret!"

"I do not care to say anything that may reflect on Lady Adelaide."

"It is her fault, you think?"

"Yes, it is her fault. She has led Mr. Lester into embarrassment, and she most certainly excites him against his son. Maria, I do not suppose she will *allow* Mr. Lester to assist Wilfred; or to bequeath even his mother's money to him."

"She must be terribly unjust. In petty things I know she is; but in this—— Has she any conscience, Margaret?"

"Conscience is of elastic material in general," replied Miss Bordillion, with a half smile. "And now, Maria, that is all I wish to say of Lady Adelaide, and I hardly know how I got betrayed into saying so much. It is a state of things sufficiently patent to Danesheld; and we cannot expect

butchers and bakers to practise benevolence in opposition to their own interests."

"And you have really been going without sugar and butter, Margaret, that you may assist Wilfred and his wife?"

Margaret had been going without other things; but she answered the remark carelessly.

"A very little matter of self-denial, that, Maria! Be so kind as to guard the secret carefully out of doors."

"Why should it be a secret? Are you afraid of offending papa?"

"Yes. Though perhaps not exactly in the sense you mean. I should not like to offend him, and I ought not to like it: remember, I live in this house of his rent free; I spoke to him about paying rent for it after you left it, but he only laughed at me. My fear is, that were it known I, or any one else, helped Wilfred, he would be thought of in his father's house with all the greater harshness."

"Margaret, what is to become of them?"

"I cannot say—I am afraid to think. You see, putting pecuniary considerations aside, there is

no one to give a helping hand to lift Wilfred out of his present position. A government appointment was talked of; and he would do his best in it, or in anything else, I am sure: but how is he to get it, now his father has turned against him? I wish Lord Dane would be his friend!"

"And meanwhile they are starving!"

"With the exception of what little I can give them: and that is indeed a little. With two genteel households to be kept out of a hundred a year," continued Margaret, with an attempt at gaiety, "you must not wonder that my sugar and butter are too costly to be approached lightly. The worst is"—and her tone went back to the very utmost gravity of which human tones are capable—"Wilfred has taken up all this as barbarous injustice, and in heart is resenting it accordingly."

The words recalled Maria to a sense of what she had come out that night to speak of; though indeed it could not be said to need recall, since it had been making itself heard throughout; a sort of underlying miserable current.

"Margaret, I wanted to ask you—have you heard the rumours that are arising touching

Wilfred? That he—that he has been seen abroad at night, on Lord Dane's lands?"

"Hush!" interrupted Miss Bordillion, glancing round with a movement that seemed born of fear.

"Then you have heard it! Oh, Margaret, tell me!—do you think it is true?"

"I think rumour of all kinds, Maria, just as likely to be false as true. Our better plan is always to ignore it."

"Margaret, I came out this boisterous night to ask you," she piteously said; "I was obliged to come, I could not rest. Do you know anything for certain?"

"I do not," was the calm reply—and it seemed to Maria's sensitive ears that Margaret had suddenly grown calm and cold.

"I met him just now with a gun. I don't know what he was doing with it at this hour. He said it had been lent to him. Do you know if that is true?"

"No, I don't know anything about that. I daresay it is true."

"He told me you had helped him to take out a shooting licence."

"That is true."

"Should Wilfred do anything wrong, I think it would kill me," murmured Maria, lifting her pale and pleading face.

"It would kill Edith."

"And you won't put me out of my suspense, Margaret?"

"Maria, understand me. I really know nothing of this, except that I have heard that rumours to Wilfred's discredit are abroad. I do not think they are true—I hope they are not: and it will be well that you and I should entirely ignore them."

"It is not putting me out of my suspense," sighed Maria.

"I'll tell you what I am going to put you out of—and that's out of my house," said Miss Bordillion, laughing, "or you'll not get home to-night. Hark at that wind."

Maria fell into a most disheartening reverie; revolving all she had heard and seen—all she feared. But Miss Bordillion did not allow her time to indulge it. She bade her maid call Mr. Lester's gardener, an elderly man who lived

close by, and despatched Maria home between them.

And what with the elastic spirits of youth, and what with the pranks the wind played them, which seemed to get higher as the moon rose, Maria arrived at the Hall in a state of struggle and laughter, her bonnet a close prisoner in her hands, her veil gone on an aerial voyage, and her hair hanging.

CHAPTER V.

THE SHIPWRECK.

RARELY had such a night been known within the memory of the oldest inhabitant of Danesheld. The storm of wind was terrific. Now it swept through the air with a rushing, booming sound; now it shook old gables and tall chimneys, unhinged shutters, and crushed down out-houses; and now it caused the few men and women, who ventured abroad, to stagger or to fall as they strove to walk along. But for the wind, the night would have been nearly as bright as day, for the large, clear moon was at the full; but the clouds that madly swept across its face obscured its brightness perpetually, causing a dark shadow to fall upon the earth. Even the fitful gusts, when clouds were absent, seemed to hide the moon's rays, and dim them.

A knot of men were congregated in the tap-

room of the Sailors' Rest. They were sheltered certainly, but the house was exposed on one side to the sea, and seemed to rock and howl with the blast. Richard Ravensbird, looking not a day older than when you saw him last—hard, composed, phlegmatic as ever—was waiting on his customers, and saying little, as usual. Ravensbird had done well at the Sailors' Rest. He and his house were alike irreproachable, and he had earned—and gained—the respect of Danesheld. If his object had been to live down the old scandal of suspicion attaching to his name, he had eminently succeeded; and even that dépôt of gossip, the coastguard station, would have suspected any one in the town or county to be guilty of a great crime, rather than the landlord of the Sailors' Rest.

Mrs. Ravensbird was in the bar-parlour. Her usual place of occupancy in the evening was the private sitting-room; but that happened to look out on the sea, and she had come out of it stopping her ears. Sophie did look older, in spite of her smart caps. Somehow, after Frenchwomen pass thirty they age unaccountably, and Mrs.

Ravensbird was no exception. She had not changed in manner, but was free of tongue and ready at repartee, just as she always had been. There was one child, a boy, to whom they were giving an excellent education, and who was nearly always away at school. He was born a twelve-month after their marriage; and it appeared likely that he would be the only olive-branch. Sophie at least did not regret this. One day when the boy had the measles and appeared very ill, some neighbourly gossip ventured to sympathise with Mrs. Ravensbird on the score that there was not another of them, and Sophie opened her eyes roundly in wonder. Did people think she was going to allow herself to be bothered with the tracasserie of *two* children?—to suffer with two?—to amass fortunes for two? she demanded indignantly. “Pas si bête.”

“How is Cattley getting on?” inquired one of the company in the bar, as he began to fill a fresh pipe. It was the same bar where we once saw Mr. Hawthorne drop a brass ladle, as Ravensbird rose his head above the screen to the unhappy landlord’s consternation. The screen was

there still, but considerably enlarged : it made the sweep of the room now, shutting off only the entrance as a sort of passage. A vast improvement ; and few rooms wear a more comfortable appearance than did this bar of Ravensbird's, with its well-kept furniture and its bright fire.

Ravensbird, whom the speaker had addressed, took no notice. He had just handed a jug of ale to another of the company, and was counting the halfpence returned into his hand.

"I say, landlord, have you heard how Cattley is?" repeated the speaker, who was owner of a fishing-boat, and named Marls.


"Cattley may be better or he may be worse," was the short and not very gracious reply of Mr. Ravensbird ; and one, skilled in defining tones, might have suspected that the subject was not palatable to the landlord. "I don't meddle in business that does not concern me."

"That's as good as to say that I do," said Marls, with good humour. "Not that it's much meddling, the inquiring after a half-murdered man. When I went out, three days ago, it was thought he was a-dying."

"A fine trouble your boat had to get in!" interrupted a coast-guardsman. "I was on duty this afternoon, and see it a labouring."

"Trouble!" echoed Marls. "I never was out in such a gale, and the wind blowing us right on shore. It took us all we knew, I can tell you, to make the port and not the beach. Has nobody heard aught of Cattley?"

"Cattley's better," spoke one who was sitting next the fire. "Them police must put themselves into it, and nearly do for him, though, with their worrying, wanting him to swear to Beecher and Tom Long. But Cattley couldn't swear to them, though he said he'd no moral doubt that they were two of the lot. Old Beecher came forward with all the brass in the world, and swore his son was at home in bed at the time. Nobody would believe old Beecher on his oath, but there was no proof, as Cattley couldn't swear. My lord's savage about it. It's said he is going to be as sharp over his preserves as it was thought he'd be lenient. He told old Beecher that his oaths went for nothing, and regretted the evidence was not more conclusive."



"Have they got the third?" asked another fisherman. "There was a third, wasn't there?"

"Said to be. Cattley speaks of another who was watching at a distance. Keeping guard, no doubt."

"That was Drake, then," spoke Marls. "Smuggling or poaching, it all comes alike to him. I'd lay a crown it was Drake."

"You'd lose it, Marls. The third fellow was a tall, thin man. Drake's short and stumpy. Landlord, there's the missis calling to you."

And, indeed, Mrs. Ravensbird's voice was heard in some commotion, calling "Richard, Richard!" Ravensbird went out, leaving a smart maid to do duty for him. Sophie stood just inside the parlour, a candle in her hand.

"Richard, I have been up stairs, and I protest I was afraid to stop. The house rocks as if it would fall."

"The house is all safe," returned Ravensbird. "It has weathered out gales as bad as this."

"I don't think we have ever had such a gale as this. Hark at it!"

She shivered as she stood. Ravensbird, who

was a very good husband on the whole, though sometimes a little crusty, took the candle from her hand, and bade her sit down, drawing a chair near for himself. A short while, and the smart maid came in.

"They are calling for more ale in the taproom, sir," she said. "Am I to serve it? It wants but two minutes to eleven."

"Oh, for goodness' sake, Richard, let them stop on as long as they like to-night," interposed Sophie. "Better be in danger in company than alone, and I'm sure I shall not dare to go to bed."

"Not dare to go to bed!" repeated Ravensbird, in surprise. "Why, Sophie, what's the matter with you? Folks sleep best in windy weather."

"It's a worse wind than I've known since I came to the Sailors' Rest," returned Sophie, who invariably had the last word. "For my part, I wish they'd stop on in the taproom till morning."

Ravensbird returned to the bar, and told the company it was eleven o'clock. They did not, however, seem inclined to move: and, whether it was the wind howling without, which certainly does induce to the enjoyment of comfort within, or whe-

ther in compliance with his wife's words, Ravensbird proved less rigid than usual as to closing his house at eleven, and suffered more ale to be drawn. The servant was handing it round, when a fresh customer entered. It was Mitchel, the preventive-man. He took off an oil-skin cape he wore, and sat down.

"Why, Mitchel! is it the wind that has blown you here?" were the words Ravensbird greeted him with. "I thought you were on duty to-night."

"The wind won't let me stop on duty, Mr. Ravensbird, so it may be said to have blown me here," replied Mitchel. "I saw you were not closed, through the chinks in the shutters. It's an awful night."

"Not much danger of a contraband boat-load stealing up to the beach to-night," laughed one of the company.

"No, the Flying Dutchman himself couldn't bring it up," said Mitchel. "What with the security from that sort of danger, and the non-security from another, namely, that we might get whirled off the heights into the sea, and be never more

heard of, the supervisor called us off duty. There's a terrific sea rolling in."

"The men have not been on duty below all day?"

"Couldn't have stood it," answered Mitchel, "the sea would have washed them away. It's great rubbish to have men there at all, now they have put us on to the heights. I'm afraid of one thing," he added, lowering his voice.

"What's that?"

"That there's a ship in distress. My eyesight's uncommon good for a distance, as some of you know, and I feel sure that I made her out, and even her very lights. I pointed her out to Baker just now, but he could see nothing and thought I was mistaken. Not I!"

"And she's in distress?"

"Could a ship be off the coast, in such a storm as this, and not be in distress?" was Mitchel's answer. "And the wind blowing dead on shore! Mark me! if that is a ship, she'll be on the rocks to-night. I——"

The man's voice stopped abruptly, and the assembly simultaneously started to their feet. A

heavy, booming sound had struck upon their ears. Mrs. Ravensbird rushed into the room.

“Is that a cannon?” she exclaimed, in alarm.

If it was a cannon, it was firing off quick, sharp strokes, one after the other, as no cannon ever had been known to do yet. Some of those startled listeners had heard that sound before; some had not.

“It is the great bell at the Castle!” uttered Mitchel. “I am sure of it. The last time it rang out was for that fire in the stables, before the old lord died. What can be the matter?”

With one accord the company left their seats and went into the road, peering towards the Castle in the thought of fire. Sophie accompanied them, holding on her real lace cap with her two hands; the barmaid followed, holding hers. They could not see anything alarming, but they talked to make up for it, shrieking out to be heard above the howling wind.

“I wish you would be still for an instant,” interposed Ravensbird. “Listen: as keenly as the wind and that heavy bell will allow you.”

They hushed their clamour and bent their ears

in obedience to the injunction. And then they caught what the noise in the taproom had prevented their hearing before : a minute-gun fired from the sea.

"It is the ship in distress," eagerly spoke Mitchel; "I knew she would be. She's signalling for help. And the Castle bell is giving notice of it; as it used to do in the old times."

At this juncture, one of the Dane retainers was discerned speeding past on the main road. They knew him by his livery of white and purple, and the group flew up the by-way and seized him.

"Don't stop me," he exclaimed; "I'm going in search of Lord Dane. There's a large ship in distress. She looks like an Indiaman, and may be filled with home-bound passengers."

"I said so," observed Mitchel. "How did you make her out?" he asked of the footman.

"Some of us fancied we heard signals of distress from sea, and went up to the turret-chamber, and there made out the ship, and saw quite plainly the flash of her minute-guns, though

the wind deadened their sound. Mr. Bruff gave orders then for the alarm-bell to be rung, and sent me off to Squire Lester's in search of my lord."

A very short while, and all Danesheld who could trust to their legs found themselves on the beach, called out by the alarm-bell. Some tied on handkerchiefs to keep their hats on, some went in handkerchiefs alone, some in nothing. The ship, drifting gradually in-shore with the wind, was nearer now, and her guns were louder.

They could discern her very plainly in the snatches of bright moonlight—a noble ship. One old sailor who possessed fine eyesight, keener than even Mitchel, professed to make out her build, and declared she was an American. Whatever she might be, she was certainly drifting on rapidly to her doom.

Her position was a little to their left hand as the people stood, and she would most likely strike just beyond the village, towards Dane Castle. The wind was as a hurricane, howling and shrieking, buffeting the spectators, and taking away almost their life's breath; the waves rose mountains

high, with their hoarse roar; and the once good ship cracked and groaned as she bent to their fury.

O, the scene on board!—could those watchers from the shore have witnessed it! Awful indeed seemed the jarring elements to them—the spectators; what then must they have been to those who were hopelessly in their power! It seemed to the excited lookers-on that they could hear the cries of despair ascending from the ill-fated ship; and imagination, not less vivid than true, pictured, as in a mirror, the awful bearings of the scene. Bewildering confusion reigned, sickening distress, unbounded fear. Almost as terrible as that Great Day of the Last Judgment, as foreshadowed for us. For them that Last Day was at hand—time was over; eternity was beginning—and all were not prepared to meet it!

Two gentlemen came up together, arm-in-arm, and the crowd parted to give them place: Lord Dane and Mr. Lester. Mr. Lester carried a night-glass, but the wind rendered it useless.

“Why, she’s nearly close in shore!” exclaimed Lord Dane, in an accent of horror.

"Another half-hour, my lord, and she'll be upon the rocks," responded a bystander.

"Mercy! how fast she's drifting! One can see her drift!"

"My men," said Mr. Lester, addressing himself more particularly to the fishermen and sailors there congregated, "can nothing be done?"

One unanimous, subdued sound was heard in answer: "No!"

"If one of 'em, any crack swimmer, could leave the ship and come ashore with a lead line, that's their only chance," observed an old man. "Not that I think he'd succeed; the waves would swallow him long before he got to it."

"There's the life-boat!" cried Lord Dane.

The crowd shook their heads with a pitying smile. "No life-boat could put off in such a sea as this!"

Never, perhaps, had been witnessed a more hopeless spectacle of prolonged agony. Once, twice, three times a blue light was burnt on board the ship, lighting up, more distinctly than the moon had done, her crowd on deck, some of whom were standing with outstretched hands. And yet

those on shore could give no help. Men ran from the beach to the heights, and from the heights to the beach, in painful, eager excitement; and they could do nothing.

On she came—on, on; slowly and surely. The night wore; the hurricane raged in its fury; the waves roared and tossed in their terrific might, and the good ship came lurching on steadily to her doom. Very singular to say—singular as it seemed to the agonised spectators—now that death was inevitable, the despairing cries had ceased.

In two hours from the time that the Castle-bell boomed out, she struck, and the first sea washed many souls overboard, who began battling with the waves in their own poor might and strength, as hopelessly as the ship had battled. Cries came over the water then, with a shrill wailing sound, and were echoed by the watchers; some of whom—women—fell on their knees in their nervous excitement, and prayed God to have mercy on the spirits of the drowning.

“She’ll go to pieces! she’ll go to pieces! and no earthly aid can save her!” were the hoarse words that went up around.

As they were being spoken, another dashed into the heart of the throng—one who appeared not yet to have been among the spectators. It was Wilfred Lester. He wore his sporting clothes, as he had done when Maria met him earlier in the evening. Pressing through to the front with scant ceremony, he leaned his arms on the rails of the little jetty, and contemplated the beating vessel.

“Good heavens!” he uttered, after a few moments’ steadfast gaze; “she must have struck!”

“This five minutes ago!”

“What is that in the water?” he continued, after another pause.

“Human beings, drowning. They are being washed off the ship fast!” And at the answer, all that Wilfred Lester possessed of excitement, was aroused within him.

“Human beings, drowning!” he repeated, his voice harsh with emotion. “And you are not attempting to rescue them. Are you mad, or only wicked?”

One by his side pointed to the foaming sea.

“Let that answer you.”

"It is no answer," said Wilfred Lester.
"Where's the life-boat?"

He turned in his impulsive indignation, and Mr. Lester drew himself away into the midst of the crowd: he had not cared latterly to come in contact with his son. Lord Dane, on the contrary, pressed up, and laid his hand upon the young man's arm.

"You are excited, Lester," he quietly observed: "and I acknowledge the sight is more than sufficient to stir the most stoical heart ever put into man. But nothing can be done. You might as well talk of a balloon as a life-boat: the one could no more get to the ship than the other."

"The effort might be made," returned Wilfred, in a resentful tone, as he dashed his wild hair from his brow—and the wind was making everybody's hair wild that night. "It might be made, I say."

"And the lives of those making it sacrificed," rejoined Lord Dane.

Wilfred Lester disdained further reply, and turned to where a knot of fishermen were con-

gregated. He was familiar with them all; and had been from boyhood.

"Bill Gand, where's the life-boat?" he asked of that old weather-beaten tar, who looked sixty at the least, to judge by the wrinkles on his face. "Is she ready?"

Bill Gand pointed with his finger to a small and snug creek at some little distance: he was not a man of fluent words. The life-boat was moored in the creek, and could be out at sea (wind and weather permitting) in a few minutes.

"Was made ready when the Castle bell tolled out, Master Wilfred," answered he.

"And why have you not put off in her?" demanded Wilfred, in a tone of command.

"Couldn't dare, sir. And the sea's higher now, if anything, nor it was then."

"Couldn't dare!" scornfully echoed Wilfred Lester, whose anger, like that of the waves, seemed to be rising. "I never knew a British sailor could be a coward until now; I did not think 'couldn't dare' was in his vocabulary. I am going out in the life-boat: if there's one or

two amidst you who can overcome 'fear' you had better come with me."

He turned to quit the spot and make for the creek, but fifty voices assailed him. "It would be sheer madness to attempt it." "Did he mean to throw away his life?" "He and the life-boat would be swamped together!"

"Then swamped we will be," retorted Wilfred. "Do you see there?" he added, waving his hand in the direction of the ill-fated ship. "When your fellow-creatures' lives are being sacrificed wholesale, when you see them buffeting with the pitiless waves, does it become you to hesitate in attempting their rescue—and you brave seamen? Come on, my men! if there be any of you who deserve the name!"

How contagious is example—how valuable a little sterling encouragement—how effective a spice of stinging ridicule! Several "good men and true," acted on by the words, declared themselves ready to man the life-boat; and pretty nearly the whole crowd trooped off in the wake of Wilfred Lester.

He was long of leg and fleet of foot, and was already busy with the boat when they reached him. A voice called out that if she must go out, Mr. Wilfred had best not be one of those to man her; he was no sailor. Wilfred Lester caught the words, and turned his handsome face towards the sound; very pale looked his features in the moonlight—pale, but resolute.

“Who said that?” he asked.

It was old Bill Gand. And Bill avowed it.

“You are not yourself, Bill Gand, to-night. Would I urge others on a danger that I shrink from?”

“Venture in that there boat, Master Wilfred, and you wunna reach the ship alive,” cried Bill, “let alone come back. Nor the rest, nor the boat neither.”

“It is possible; but I think we may hope for a better result,” was the answer: and in truth Wilfred Lester seemed carried out of himself to-night. “We are embarking in a good cause, and God is over us.”

The last words told: for, of all men, a sailor has the most implicit trust in God’s mercy—a

simple, childlike, perfect trust, that many who call themselves more religious might envy. They were contending now who should man her, numbers being eager; and there appeared some chance of its rising to a quarrel.

"This is my expedition," said Wilfred Lester, and his voice had all that command in it that these moments of danger will sometimes bring forth. "But for me you would not have attempted it; allow me the privilege, therefore, of choosing my men. Bill Gand, will you make one of us or not?"

"Yes," answered the old sailor, "if it's only to take care of you. My wife's in the churchyard, and my two boys are under the waters: I shall be less missed nor some."

The others were soon named, and they went into the boat. Wilfred was about to follow them, when some one glided up, and stood before him.

"Will it prove availing if *I* ask you not to peril your life?"

The speaker was Mr. Lester. Wilfred hesitated a moment before he answered:

"I could not, for any consideration, abandon the expedition: nevertheless, I thank you; I thank you heartily, if you spoke out of interest for my welfare. Father, this may be our last meeting: shall we shake hands? . If I do perish, regret me not; for I tell you truly, life has lost its value for me."

Mr. Lester grasped the offered hand in silence, a more bitter pang wringing his heart than many of the bystanders would have believed: but the incident had been almost unnoticed amid the thronging and pushing crowd. Wilfred leaped into the boat; and it put off on its stormy voyage, the spectators tearing round again to the spot, whence they could see the sinking ship.

What a fine picture the scene would have made, could it have been represented both to the eye and the ear! not unlike those old Dutch paintings of the Flemish school. The doomed ship and her unhappy freight of human life, soon to be human life no longer: the life-boat launched on her perilous venture, making some way in spite of the impending wind—now riding aloft, now engulfed under a huge wave, now

battling with the furious sea for mastery: the anxious faces of the spectators, and their hushed, breathless interest, as they watched the progress of the boat, or the dim and dreadful spot further on! The bright moonlight lighted up the whole scene; cloud after cloud was chasing each other along the night sky: the faint tinkle of a bell might be heard ever and anon from the ship, and the great heavy Castle bell boomed out still at intervals.

Would the boat reach the ship? Those in the boat, as well as those on shore, were asking the question. Bill Gand, the oldest of them, declared that he had never wrestled with a gale so terrific, with waves so furious. The mystery to Bill then—and it would remain a mystery throughout all his after life—was, that they *did* wrestle with them. Minute by minute, as they strove to labour on, and the angry sea beat them, back, did he believe would be their last; that the next must see them in eternity: all who were with him believed so, including Wilfred Lester. How was it that they did escape? It appeared nothing less than a miracle—an impossibility ef-

fectcd; and when endeavouring to account for it afterwards, they were wont to repeat the words Wilfred Lester had spoken on shore: "It was a good cause, and God was over them."

But they did not reach the ship. No: too many poor wretches were struggling with the waves, nearer to them; and they picked up what they could—picked up until the boat would hold no more. It was a very small boat at the best, almost an apology for a boat, and was nearly filled by those who manned it. Danesheld had long cried out against it: but it was easier to cry than to get a new one. Shouting out a cheering word of hope to the wreck, which the wind probably took to itself and kept, they turned in shore again.

The going back was less labour, for they had the wind with them: but it was not less dangerous. Some of the men, powerful, hardy sailors that they were, felt their strength drooping; they did not think they could hold out to the shore. Wilfred Lester encouraged them, as he had done in going, cheering-on their spirits, almost renewing their physical strength. But for him, they would seve-

ral times have given up the effort in despair, when they were first beating on for the wreck.

"Bear on with a will, my brave lads," he urged; "don't let the fatigue master you. I and Bill Gand are good for another turn yet; but we'll leave you on shore to recruit your force, and bring others in your stead. You shall join again the third time. Cheerily on with a will! I wonder how many times it will take to save them all?"

One of the rescued spoke up to answer; apparently the only one yet able to speak. The others were lying, hurt or exhausted, at the bottom of the boat. He was a thin, light, able-bodied seaman, and seemed none the worse for the immersion in the water.

"It would take several times, master; but you'll never get the chance of going to her a third time, if you do a second. She was parting amidships."

"Parting amidships!"

"The captain said so. She was, too. I think she must have struck upon a rock; she was grinding and cracking awfully."

"Whence does she come?"

"From New York. A passenger ship. A prosperous voyage we have had all along from starting, and this is the ending! A fine ship she was, spick and span new, eleven hundred tons register, her name The Wind. I didn't like her name, for my part, when I joined her."

"Many passengers?"

"Forty or fifty; about half a dozen of them first-class; the rest, second."

The above conversation had but been carried on in snatches, at long intervals, as the howling wind and the struggling boat permitted. Soon it ceased altogether, for every energy had to be devoted to the boat, if they were to get her to the shore.

A low, heartfelt murmur of applause greeted their ears as they reached it; it might have been louder but for the remembrance of what the brave adventurers had yet to do, and the little chance there was of its being done—the very small portion these few, saved, formed of those to be saved. As Wilfred Lester stepped ashore, his face white with exertion, and the salt foam

dripping off him, it is possible that he looked for a father's hand to welcome him, a father's voice to cheer him. If so, he was mistaken. Mr. Lester was there still, but he did not press to the front; he did not appear to recognise that Wilfred was even known to him. Ah, what a difference does it make in our feelings of regard for our friends—their resuscitation from probable death, as compared to their entering on it!

Another spectator had been added to the scene: Mr. Lester's wife. Lady Adelaide, braving the wind, had come forth in her woman's excited curiosity, and was now standing on the beach between her husband and Lord Dane. Was her presence the obstacle that prevented Mr. Lester's further notice of his son?—or was he already repenting of his late greeting? Wilfred saw her standing there; but he was too busy to give to it more than a passing thought.

He stood, prepared to help the rescued out of the boat, almost jealous, as it seemed, that anybody else should touch them. Suddenly he turned his white face full on the thronging spec-

tators to speak, and his voice bore that nameless sound of command it had previously done, when urging to the expedition.

“Have any of you thought to provide warm beds and large fires? Otherwise these poor rescued creatures might almost as well have been left in the water.”

Richard Ravensbird was the first to respond, pressing forward a little beyond the crowd as he did so.

“I can receive two or three; my wife is at home making ready for them. I have not been able to do anything towards saving, but I can towards sheltering. There’s one coach here, and Jessop is bringing down his omnibus.”

Lord Dane spoke up, offering the Castle and every accommodation it could afford. But the Castle was too far off to be of much use to men half drowned. As they raised one man from the bottom of the boat, he spoke faintly. He had nothing on but his shirt and drawers, and seemed to be getting in years, for his wet hair, hanging over his face, shone with a white tinge in the moonlight.

"What part of the coast have we been thrown on?" he asked; "what place is this?"

"Danesheld?"

"My head," came the feeble rejoinder. "I am cold. Get a shawl for my head."

Shawls were not plentiful on the beach, but one of the bystanders divested himself of a cloak, and it was put upon the rescued man. He feebly pulled the cape over his head and face, to shield them from the wind; and another one of the rescued, a young man who was fully dressed, as if he had been flung into the sea without a minute for preparation, hastened to assist him. It seemed that he was in attendance on him, as friend or servant; or, might be, only as fellow-passenger. Both were passengers; not sailors.

"I should be glad to have him conveyed to a decent inn," said the young man, "if there is such a thing at hand."

"Mine is an inn, and close by," said Ravensbird. "We'll do all we can for him."

The coach was brought up close, and the man lifted into it. The younger was 'about to follow, when he grasped Wilfred Lester's hand:

"That we owe our lives this night to you, under God, there is little doubt. I shall hope to thank you better than I can do now."

The voice proclaimed his condition. It was that of a gentleman, its tone remarkably pleasant, its accent refined. A third followed them into the coach; a sailor, this, whose head was much cut; and the coach took its departure for the Sailors' Rest, Ravensbird having run on before to be in readiness for the arrival.

Wilfred Lester began mustering his second crew. Old Bill Gand again making one of them.

"Not you, Dick," cried Wilfred, putting a man back with his arm. "I won't have you."

"And why?" said the man. "I'm strong enough. I've been stronger nor ever since that illness in the summer."

Strong? Well, perhaps he was: but it might be that Wilfred Lester was thinking of other reasons. The man had a wife and seven young children.

"I will not admit you, I say. Stand back, Dick! We have no time to lose."

Scarcely had the words left Wilfred Lester's lips, when a sound, as of a united human cry from many voices, came along, borne on the wind. Just the same sort of cry heard before, when the first of them were washed off the ship: not a cry of despair, not altogether one of fear; more the sudden, surprised cry, that we might make without thought of danger, if plunged unexpectedly into a cold bath.

"What's that?" asked the crowd.

Ah! what was it? A far louder cry went up from those questioners when they knew; a shrill wail of sympathy, full of horror. The rescued sailor's words had been too surely and swiftly verified. The vessel had parted amidships, and was settling down in the water.

Oh, for the life-boat now! One more voyage, and it may yet save a few of those now launched into the sea. Before it could take a third, the rest will have been launched into eternity.

And the life-boat hastened out amidst cheers to force itself once more on its mad way. But it rescued only one. It was blown back and buffeted, and all but lost itself; and when a lull came, and

it still pressed on to its work of mercy, there were no souls left to save. The hungry waters had made sure of their prey.

And what was the secret of that sudden calm that seemed to have fallen on the ship? There had been cries of alarm, of horror, of despair, enough and in abundance, rising from her at first, when hope seemed to be only on the wing, and she began to drift on to her doom; but as she neared it closer and closer, and hope had completely died out of the most sanguine breast, then calmness supervened.

Was not that strange? Many there were, on board, conscious of not having led good lives; some, of being the most reckless and worst of sinners; few, if any, were in that state of resigned preparation which we are apt to call "fit for death." Then, whence arose this calm, childlike resignation? What could the secret have been?

It arose in the first instance through the exertion of a minister of the church, who happened to be on board, one of the passengers. When hope was gone, and no labour of any sort remained to do, for labour was impossible in the teeth of the warring

elements, then this good man's work began, and they gathered round him in the large cabin. He told them of mercy in Christ, even in that, the last hour; he said that so long as they had but a minute of life, they had hope and opportunity; God was affording it to them. He reminded them of the pardon of the thief on the Cross; he bade them note, if they had never noted it before, how Jesus when on earth healed at once all who came to him; not waiting to ask why they did not repent before, not reproaching them with their past sins and their crying amount, but enlarging his mercy according to the greatness of the need. Jesus was waiting still, continued the minister; the same loving Jesus, who had found his pleasure in healing those sinners of old, was waiting then, hoping to heal them. No matter for their past lives; no matter though that past was rising now on their consciences, an awful burden; *that* was no impediment: had not Jesus said that he invited sinners, sinners such as they were, not the righteous? the greater the sin, the greater the pardon. He spoke of the brazen serpent in the wilderness, which Jesus himself had told them was the type of his

own sacrifice, how the poor bitten people had but to look at it with their eyes, and be healed : just so they had but to look now with their whole hearts to Jesus. Oh, if they would but cast themselves upon him with the simple faith of children, carrying their sins in their helpless hands, and pleading nothing but his sacrifice and his promises, his ever-sheltering arms would be outstretched to them, his pitying smile of love would come out to meet them. Before they called, he would answer ; before they could speak, he would hear. It was the same Jesus, waiting still, the Saviour of the world, the blessed Redeemer : *their* Saviour, their Redeemer ; let them all go to him ! He was giving them the opportunity now, before they met him face to face in eternity : he was listening to hear them cry, each individually, Lord, save me ! He was waiting to answer, I will ! to receive, and pardon, and comfort them. There he was ; asking them only to come to him, and taste of his enduring love, and live with him in the blissful peace of Heaven for ever and for ever.

And as the minister's words, delivered with that quiet earnestness which is the essence of impressive

speaking, fell on their ears, a strange sense of peace, of security, fell upon their hearts. To those dying men and women, it seemed to have come direct from Heaven, an earnest that Jesus Christ was indeed waiting for them with a loving welcome that should last for ever.

CHAPTER VI.

AT THE SAILORS' REST.

A BUSTLING night was that for Mrs. Ravensbird. She had all the capable tact of a Frenchwoman, and was equal to the occasion. Warm beds were in readiness for the shipwrecked, hot flannels, renovating drinks. The three, mentioned, were alone conveyed to the Sailors' Rest, the others found accommodation in the guard-house and elsewhere: ah, so few in all!—and the boat, as you have heard, could not make the wreck again.

The middle-aged passenger was placed in the best room: a commodious and really handsome apartment on the first floor. As he was assisted from the coach up to it, Madame Sophie cast a keen glance at him, and came to the decision that he was a tall old man. His hair was silvered, his features looked white, what she could see of them,


for the hanging wet hair and the flapping cape of the cloak : which cloak, by the way, had been furnished by Mitchel the coastguardsman. He had recovered from his exhaustion sufficiently to decline all assistance in his chamber, into which he shut himself, rubbed himself dry by the fire, got into bed between the hot blankets, and then rang the bell.

He wished for a large basin of hot gruel, with some brandy in it.

When the maid took it to him, she brought a message. The young man, his fellow-passenger saved, wished to know if he might come in, or whether he could do anything for him.

No, was the answer sent out. And the young man had best lose no time in getting into bed himself. He might come in in the morning, if he'd be so good ; and nobody else was to disturb him unless he rang for them.

Mrs. Ravensbird, in common with half Danesheld, did not go to bed that night. *She* had her hands full ; and was glad also of the excuse for sitting up, though the wind, having done its fierce work, had somewhat abated. She busied herself



attending to the rescued sailor's head, which seemed to have been cut and scored for pastime, and in drying the younger passenger's clothes, for he had been fully dressed when rescued.

It appeared that these two were the only passengers saved. The others had all gone down, and were now, it was to be hoped and trusted, at rest in Jesus. The officers had perished; the two or three others saved were common seamen. As Mrs. Ravensbird doctored the head of the one under her charge, she inquired particulars of the two sleeping men above, but the sailor could tell her nothing: they were first-class passengers, he said, but he did not even know their names.

"Are they gentlemen?" asked the inquisitive landlady, who was learned in social distinctions, the result possibly of her residence at Dane Castle; "or merchants, and people of that sort?"

The sailor could not say, but gave it as his opinion that they were most likely merchants, for "lots of trading folk" came and went between England and the States.

"It's odd you handful of folks should have been saved, while all the rest, but one, perished,"

remarked Sophie. "Quite a miracle, as one might think."

"I don't know about miracles," answered the man, rather obtusely; "I think it was because we took to the boat. There was a life-boat attached to the ship, and we managed to launch her and get into her, a few of us: she swamped after a bit, and swamped some of them in her, but it had brought the rest of us, you see, nearer to the life-boat that put off from shore, and enable it to pick us up."

"What a fight it must have been amongst you, on board the ship, which should get the life-boat!"

"Law bless you!" cried the man. "A fight! —it was rather the other way. We could hardly get enough in her: of the two, the ship seemed the safest. The captain said she couldn't live in such a sea, even if we got her clear of the vessel: and he was right; she didn't live for long. Don't cut off more of my hair than you can help, ma'am."

Very early the following morning, before seven, the younger traveller's bell rang for his

clothes. They were taken up to him, dry ; with some of Mr. Ravensbird's best linen as a temporary accommodation.

Soon after eight Mrs. Ravensbird was in her bar-parlour alone, rather explosively giving vent to some grievance, in her native language, a custom she had never forgotten or abandoned, when she suddenly found herself interrupted in French as fluent as her own and rather more pure. Turning round in her surprise, she saw the younger passenger, attired in his dry clothes ; by which in fact she recognised him, for she had scarcely seen him the previous night. And Madame Sophie, in that first moment, thought she had never seen so prepossessing a man. He was about four or five and twenty, his figure very fine, his features clearly cut, his hair dark, and his countenance and manner singularly attractive.

" Monsieur is French," remarked the gratified Sophie, with a curtsy.

" You are, I hear," he replied, with a light laugh. " And somewhat put out just now."

Ah, monsieur should have her servants just for a day, was the rejoinder. That tiresome ani-

mal of a barmaid ; thinking of her finery and her back, and not a bit of her work !

“Are you a clever needlewoman?” inquired the gentleman in English ; English as good and pure as his French.

More and more won over by the attractive looks, the courteous manner, the pleasant voice, Mrs. Ravensbird protested that there was not a better needlewoman in the world than herself. She had been externe pupil for seven years in a French convent, she said ; and, let the sisters alone for making girls expert at their needle ! Did monsieur want a button sewn on ?

The gentleman smiled. Had it been only that, he thought he could have managed the job himself without troubling her, provided she had supplied him with needle and cotton. “I had those with me,” he continued, “but they have gone down with my luggage.”

“You have saved nothing, sir?”

“Nothing except a pocket-book and a few papers which I happened to have about me. What I want you to do,” he continued, “is something that requires rather more skill than the sewing-

on of buttons. I want a shade made for the eyes."

Sophie raised her glance to the eyes looking at her; clear, bright eyes they were, of a dark grey; and she wondered what they could want with a shade.

"It is for my fellow-passenger," he proceeded to explain. "I have been to his room, and all his cry is for a shade for his eyes. He suffered with them during the voyage, I observed, and the light of the room this morning affects them much. He wishes it made very large, he says, of thin card-board, and covered with dark blue or green silk, with tape to tie it on with."

"Tape!" ejaculated Sophie, in reproof. "You mean ribbon, sir."

"Anything. He will not care what the materials are, provided his eyes are shaded. I asked if I should order breakfast for him, but he seemed only anxious for the shade."

Sophie soon got her necessary materials; a sheet of card-board, which she fished up from somewhere, and some purple silk, the remnant of a dress; and set to work. The gentleman sat

himself on the arm of an old horse-hair sofa opposite, and watched her fingers. His orders were, he said, laughingly, not to go up again without the shade.

"Who is he?" asked Sophie, as she worked. "He seemed to me last night quite an old gentleman. Do you know much of him, sir?"

"I saw a good deal of him on board."

"It's curious how intimate fellow-passengers get on board a ship!" observed Mrs. Ravensbird, whose tongue was never at fault. "Is he a merchant?"

"I don't think he is."

"What is he coming to England for?"

The gentleman laughed. "You must inquire of him, Mrs. Ravensbird, if you wish to know. I have not been so inquisitive as to do so."

"I suppose he is an American," she continued, nothing daunted. "What is his name?"

"That question I have just asked of himself, for I do not remember to have once heard it mentioned on board," was the reply. "He tells me it is Home."

"Mr. Home!" complacently continued Sophie,

as she gave a turn to the purple shade, now satisfactorily progressing. "And I hope you will give me the gratification of hearing yours, sir. I'm sure it's a pleasant one."

"Do you fancy so?" he laughed. "I see nothing much in it myself. Lydney."

"Lydney!" repeated Sophie, after him. "That's not a French name."

"My father was not of French extraction. My mother went out to America from her own country; and she married him there."

"Ah!" said Sophie, "that accounts for your speaking the two languages equally well. Then you'd be called an American, sir, not a Frenchman. What a shame!"

"I suppose I should be," he assented, his bright grey eyes full of merriment.

"And have you come over here on business, sir?"

"In truth, I think I came for pleasure; to look about me—never having had the honour of seeing old England before," he answered, with good humour. "How many more questions would you like to ask me, Mrs. Ravensbird?"

"But it's my French nature, and I must ask you to excuse it," she replied, with ready politeness.

"Suppose I ask you one in return? Is there such a thing as a tailor in—what do you call this place—Danesheld? Look at me!"

He extended a leg and an arm. The salt water had caused the clothes to shrink, so that he did not appear in the height of fashion. Sophie laughed, and gabbled on in her own tongue.

But yes, there was a charming tailor, fresh from a London establishment. He had grown ill in the great stifling metropolis, and he came down here, where his wife's friends lived, and opened a shop next door to Mr. Wild, the surgeon's, and his cut was perfect; my Lord Dane himself had honoured him with an order for a suit last week. The gentleman did not know my Lord Dane?

"Not I," answered Mr. Lydney. "He is your great man here, I presume?"

The greatest of all for miles around, Sophie answered, and he lived at Dane Castle. He was down on the jetty last night when the life-boat brought Mr. Lydney and the rest in. Ah, heaven! what a wreck it was!

All the pleasure went out of Mr. Lydney's face as she recalled it, to be replaced by true and earnest pain. He hid his eyes for a moment with his hand.

"I awoke three times in the night, and each time that I slept I had the whole scene before me," he said, in a low tone. "I feel that it will be in my dreams for weeks to come."

"You must be thankful that you are amidst the few saved, sir."

"I am," he answered, very quietly. "When the boat was being launched, the gentleman upstairs touched me on the arm. 'I shall go in it,' he said, 'it may give us a chance;' and I leaped into it with him; not, however, thinking that any chance remained to us, either in the boat or the ship."

"What did he do with his clothes?" asked Sophie.

"He ran up on deck without them, washed out of his berth. A large, warm cloth cloak, that he had flung on, was lost in the water."

"He seemed ill last night, I thought, apart from the state of shipwreck."

"He has been very ill the whole time of the voyage. Some inward complaint, I believe. Ah, thank you."

Mrs. Ravensbird was holding out the shade, completed. He said a few words of gallant admiration for her and her quickness, as he took it from her hand.

"I have not put my best work in it," she observed. "You hurried me too much for that. When would you like breakfast, sir?"

"Presently. Let us see what this sick gentleman wants first. He is older than I am."

Mr. Lydney went upstairs with the shade, and Mrs. Ravensbird began searching her memory for its records of her own country. That she had somewhere seen handsome features to which his bore a resemblance, she felt certain, and had little doubt that in her own young days she must have known his mother in France. "My heart warmed to him from the first," quoth she. "It may even turn out that his mother was a friend."

In the course of the morning, Lord Dane walked into the Sailors' Rest, to make his inquiries after the rescued. Richard Ravensbird was

not in the way at the moment, but his wife was quite equal to receiving his lordship. She did not forget the old days when he, the poor and obscure Herbert Dane, was fond of chattering to her, Sophie Deffloe ; and her manners to him retained far more of ease than did those of some of his dependents in Danesheld. She began pouring into his ear all the news she had been able to collect as regarded the two passengers, coupled with her own additions ; for Mrs. Ravensbird was one of those who form conclusions according to their active imagination, and then assume them to be facts.

They were coming over from America, she said : the elder one, a Mr. Home, travelling for his health, especially for a weakness in the eyes ; the other, a Mr. Lydney, for pleasure. They had met on board as fellow-passengers, and become friendly, and the younger one seemed inclined to be grateful and attentive to the old one, for it was through him he got into the boat and was saved.

" Both Americans, I presume ?" observed Lord Dane.

Mr. Home, yes, for certain ; Mr. Lydney was

half American, half French, was Mrs. Ravensbird's answer. Ah, the malheur! to learn that! when she had taken him to be a pure Frenchman, if ever there was one on earth. Never was such an accent heard out of Paris. And he was the pleasantest man; charming in manners; affable and free as my lord himself used to be in the by-gone days. And Madame Sophie cast a half-saucy glance to my lord when she said it.

"Are they gentlemen?" inquired Lord Dane.

"But certainly; the younger one at least," answered Mrs. Ravensbird warmly. "He looks fit, every inch of him, barring his pantaloons which have shrunk, to be what you are, my lord, a British nobleman. There's no mistaking him for anything inferior. And, do you know, his face puts me in mind of some lady I must have known in France in my early days; but for the life of me I can't think who, though I've been ransacking my memory all the morning. Wouldn't it be curious, my lord, if it should turn out that I was acquainted with his mother?"

Lord Dane smiled. "Is he up?" he asked.

"Up!" echoed Sophie; "he was up hours

ago; at seven o'clock this morning. He went out after breakfast to put a letter in the post, and to find the new tailor; and I'll be bound he then went down to the wreck, for he is in a fine way over his luggage being lost, especially some particular box that was amidst it; and wants to know whether there's any chance of things being got up. Does your lordship think there is?"

"A few things may be, perhaps. I cannot tell."

"The other one is not up," ran on Sophie. "I thought I'd take his breakfast in myself, and inquire after him, but it wasn't much he'd answer. All I could see of him was his grey hair and the purple shade I made him. He was lying buried in his pillow, under the bedclothes, his back up, and his face to the wall; and he just told me to put the tray down by the bed and leave it, and he'd help himself."

"Poor man! I dare say he was thoroughly exhausted. Will you convey a message to him for me, Mrs. Ravensbird? Say that I, Lord Dane, shall be happy to render him any assistance in my power; and if he would like me to pay him a visit, I can do so now."

Mrs. Ravensbird ran upstairs to the invalid's chamber, and came back, shaking her head.

"I'll lay any money he's a cross-grained old bachelor," cried she; "he seems afraid to look at us. And he won't see you, my lord. I call it quite rude of him. 'My service to my Lord Dane,' said he, 'but tell him I am a private individual, seeking nothing but repose, and not desirous of making acquaintance yet with any one. I'll pay my respects to his lordship when I'm better.' Some of those Americans know nothing of courtesy."

"Oh, very well," returned Lord Dane, not at all gratified at his friendly offers being rejected, "I'll not trouble him again; he can wait on me when he chooses, if it please him so to do. How is the poor sailor?"

"He's in bed too," cried Sophie; "lazy fellow! But those sailors will lie when they get a chance. A fine work I had with his head in the night! I'm sure I was an hour over it; and he seems to have no notion how it got cut about. He must have been bumping against something with a sharp edge, I say. Good day to

you, my lord, if you are going. Thank you much for calling."

As Lord Dane turned from the Sailors' Rest toward the town, Mr. Lydney was approaching it from the beach. Lord Dane did not happen to look that way, and consequently did not observe him.

"Who was that gentleman?" inquired Mr. Lydney of the landlady, who had attended his lordship to the door, and stood looking after him.

"It's Lord Dane, sir."

"Lord Dane!" came the answer, spoken in surprise. "How young he looks!"

Sophie felt rather offended on Lord Dane's account. "Did you think he was old?" she asked. "Why should you have thought that?"

A short pause, and Mr. Lydney burst into a laugh.

"Now that's the force of association," he cried. "You had spoken of this Lord Dane being the chief of Danesheld, and my mind at once pictured a venerable man, with hair as white as the passenger's upstairs, or whiter. He is a tall, fine man, and looks quite young."

"All the Danes were that."

"It's in their race to be so, I suppose?"

"That it is. He came to inquire after you and the old gentleman, to offer a visit and his services. I took up the message to Mr. Home, but he would not see him, and his lordship's gone off in high dudgeon."

"Perhaps he'll see him when he's up."

"Perhaps he won't," answered free Sophie. "Lord Dane said he should not come again; if Mr. Home wanted him he might go to him. I must say, sir, it was not very polite of your friend."

"I don't suppose politeness had anything to do with it one way or the other, Mrs. Ravensbird. Mr. Home may have felt physically unequal to receive a visitor; he certainly seemed so this morning."

"Why doesn't he have a doctor called in, then?"

"I suggested that to him the first thing to-day, but he declined; saying all he wanted was a little rest and quiet. I think he's right; he is not injured."

“And about his dinner?” continued Mrs. Ravensbird, rather resentfully. “I went in myself, just before my Lord Dane arrived, asking whether he’d like slops, or whether he’d have a nice little chicken cooked, but he growled out something about wanting no dinner, and would hardly answer me. Perhaps you’ll try, sir.”

Mr. Lydney laughed, and ran lightly up the stairs, calling back that perhaps the invalid would not answer him.

It was a most comfortable and commodious room, the one in which Mr. Home lay—the best in the Sailors’ Rest—and Mrs. Ravensbird was in the habit of calling it the state chamber. The bed was at the far end, opposite the door, and the fireplace in the middle, between the two. Save for the bed, it might have been a handsome sitting-room, but Sophie had exercised her French taste upon it. The furniture was of mahogany, the curtains of the bed and windows were of blue moreen damask. A sofa was drawn up near the fire; a round table stood in the middle of the room; side-tables and other furniture against the walls. A great ugly beam ran across the ceiling

it's true, but that did not deteriorate from the real comfort of the room. The apartment occupied by Mr. Lydney was at the opposite side of the passage; a small room scantily furnished. Mrs. Ravensbird secretly wished the respective occupants had been reversed. She hinted at this in her liking for the young man; and he, in his free, good-humoured way, said his chamber was paradise after his berth in the life-boat. At the end of the passage was a sitting-room, looking out over the sea. Mr. Lydney took possession of this, and his meals were served in it.

The invalid lay in bed the whole day. Towards dusk, Richard Ravensbird went in and found the chamber nearly in darkness. The heavy curtains were kept drawn before the windows, on account of the sick man's weak eyes; the fire had gone down to a black mass. Ravensbird stirred it into a blaze, and was quietly sweeping up the hearth, when Mr. Home suddenly addressed him :

"What sort of a neighbourhood is this?"

"Sir?" he cried, turning round.

"What sort of a neighbourhood is this?"

Mr. Ravensbird probably wondered in what

light he was intended to take the question, whether as to its natural, its social, or its political features. But he did not inquire.

"It's a dull neighbourhood rather," said he, "except when it gets enlivened by any such event as the one last night, or by a poaching or smuggling affray. Not that there's any smuggling to speak of now. Lord Dane's having abandoned the place for several years has not tended to make it gayer."

"He is your great man of the locality, this Lord Dane—as I hear from my fellow-passenger in the next room."

"Oh yes, sir. The Danes have been the lords of Danesheld from times unheard of. And plenty of state they have kept up. But, to have the Castle closed, or as good as closed, has been like a blight upon the place. The present Lord Dane has not lived at it."

"Why so?"

"He went abroad almost as soon as he came into the title, and has not long returned. Eight or nine years he must have been away. Perhaps more: time flies. It's thought he will remain

now, and I dare say he will ; he has reorganised the establishment at the Castle."

"He is not married, is he?"

"No, sir. His sister, Miss Dane, is with him at the Castle at present, acting as its mistress."

"Perhaps you will inform me what you are talking of," cried the invalid, after a pause. "Lord Dane has no sister."

"Yes he has, sir. And she is with him, as I tell you, at the Castle."

"Then I tell you he has not a sister," was the sick man's irritable answer, though his tone was, and had been, remarkably low and subdued throughout. "I met a Mr. Dane once in Paris, I remember ; it was the present peer ; there was no sister then."

It was Richard Ravensbird's custom, when people insisted upon a proposition that he knew to be a mistaken one, to let them hold their own opinion uncontradicted. As he did now. He stretched his neck up to get a sight of the sick man's face, feeling sure it was an obstinate one, but did not succeed : the upper part was under

the purple shade, the lower part under the bed-clothes.

"Yes, I met the present peer in Paris, and had a sort of acquaintance with him," continued the invalid. "I heard afterwards that he had succeeded to the title, and of the accident to the younger son, Captain Harry Dane. Has he ever been heard of?"

"Who, sir?" asked Ravensbird.

"Captain Dane."

Mr. Ravensbird did not answer at once. He was wondering whether the stranger could be cognizant of his having been charged with the murder—a point upon which he was still sensitive—and was saying this deliberately to insult him.

"Did you know the particulars of that accident, sir?" he at length asked.

"Yes, I did. I did not get them from Mr. Dane, though. A nasty pitch over for him. Was he ever heard of, landlord?"

"He was heard of, sir, in so far as that his body was found. He lies buried in the family vault."

"Where was it found?"

"At sea. It was picked up by one of our fishing-boats. Not that it had been in the water all the time. But for me I doubt if they'd have recognised it. I knew it by certain marks the moment I put my eyes on it, and I happened to be on the beach when it was brought in."

"Why should you recognise it better than other people?"

"I was Captain Dane's servant, sir; had been with him several years."

"Oh, ay; then I must have heard of you," remarked Mr. Home. "Was there not some quarrel talked of, landlord? I'm sure it was reported so."

Richard Ravensbird came to the conclusion that the gentleman had heard the other report, touching him—the accusation—and was leading up to it. He therefore set himself to speak of it calmly and openly, as he always did, to those aware of his arrest; otherwise he preferred to maintain a complete reticence on all points relating to that night.

"Yes, it was a fatal fall, a nasty struggle," Ravensbird observed: "and who the adversary

was, remains a mystery to this day. Two or three were suspected. I, for one, and was taken up on suspicion; and a packman, for another, who was seen in angry contest with the captain on the heights just about the time. In my own mind, I suspected somebody very different."

"Pray whom did you suspect?"

"I should be sorry to tell," answered Ravensbird.

"And what were the grounds for suspecting you?"

"A quarrel I had had with Captain Dane. It occurred in the morning, and he kicked me out of the Castle; the catastrophe took place the same evening, and people's suspicions—naturally enough, I acknowledge—flew to me. But they were wrong. I would have saved my master's life with my own: I would almost bring him back to life now at the sacrifice of my own, were it in my power. I was much attached to him, and I am faithful to his memory."

"In spite of the kicking-out?" put in Mr. Home.

"Tush!" returned Ravensbird, nettled. "I

beg your pardon, sir. A dispute of a moment, in which we both lost our tempers, could not destroy the friendship of years. Yes, sir, I presume to say it—friendship. He was the Honourable Captain Dane, and I but his servant; and though he never lost his dignity any more than I forgot my place, there was a feeling between us that might be called friendship. No man ever had a more faithful servant than I was to my master.”

There ensued a silence. Ravensbird mended the fire, which was getting low, and the gentleman turned in his bed.

“What has become of the cousin, Herbert Dane? I used to hear of him. He was to have married some young lady staying at the Castle—at least it was thought there was an attachment.”

“Lady Adelaide Errol,” said Ravensbird, who had not clearly heard the first part of the question, through some clatter with the fire-irons. “Yes, there was an attachment, but she would not have him after all, and she married a gentleman whom we call Squire Lester. Ah, she was another mystery.”

"In what way?"

"Well, I thought so at the time. She has a whole troop of children now. The young man who was chiefly instrumental in saving you last night, sir, was Squire Lester's eldest son, Mr. Wilfred Lester: his mother was Squire Lester's first wife. But for him, the life-boat would never have gone out. He is under a sad cloud, poor fellow."

"What sort of a cloud, pray?"

"More sorts than one, sir. He is out at pockets and out at elbows; tales are told that he and his young wife are starving; and when a gentleman is reduced to that condition, he's apt not to be too particular as to what he puts his hands to. It's a miserable business altogether, and Lady Adelaide's at the bottom of it."

"You are speaking to me in riddles, landlord."

Ravensbird explained. Telling briefly the circumstances that led to the reducing of Squire Lester's son to his present position, and certainly not sparing Lady Adelaide in the recital.

"It's a pity," was the comment of Mr. Home,

when he had listened. "I did not take much notice of him last night, was not in a condition to do it, but he seemed a fine young fellow. We were speaking of Mr. Herbert Dane, landlord. What has become of him? Is he at Danesheld?"

"Why yes, sir, now. I said so. He is at the Castle."

"At the Castle! What for?"

Ravensbird gave his neck another stretch, thinking if he could get a tolerable glimpse of the face over the mound of bedclothes, he might be able to draw some deduction as to whether its owner was in his right mind. In vain; he could see nothing but the tip of the nose—a thin and handsome nose, it's true, but what of that?

"He has come to the Castle to reside, sir."

"He! Does Lord Dane tolerate him in it?"

The usually impassive face of Mr. Richard Ravensbird was for once a puzzled mass of astonishment. Light dawned on it.

"Why, sir, is it possible you do not know that Herbert Dane is the present peer? Lord Dane, that we have been speaking of, he who called to

inquire after you to-day, was formerly Herbert Dane. He succeeded the old lord."

Mr. Home raised himself on his elbow, and peered at Ravensbird from under the purple shade.

"Then what on earth has become of the eldest son — Geoffrey—he whom I was with in Paris? Where was he, that Herbert Dane should inherit?"

"He died at the same time as his brother," answered Ravensbird, shaking his head. "Before the body of my master was found, the remains of Mr. Dane were brought home for interment in the family vault."

"Where did he die? What did he die of?" reiterated Mr. Home, who appeared unable to overcome his astonishment.

"He died of fever, sir. I can't take upon myself to say precisely where, for I forget; it was near to Rome, and I know he was put on board at Civita Vecchia. My lady went almost as quick; and the old lord did not live above a month or two."

"I know, I know," cried the stranger, with an impatience that seemed almost feverish; "I saw their deaths announced in the newspapers;

and I saw the succession of the new peer, 'Geoffry, Lord Dane.' Not of Herbert."

"His name is Herbert Geoffry, sir," explained Ravensbird. "As soon as he became heir, he was no longer called Herbert, but Geoffry. It is a favourite name with the Lords of Dane."

Mr. Home laid down and covered his face. Ravensbird waited in silence, rather wondering.

"It has been quite a shock of surprise to me, look you, landlord. I had thought to renew my former acquaintance with the Geoffry Dane I once knew, never supposing but he was the present peer. When they brought me word up to-day that Lord Dane had called, I took it to be him; but I did not care for him to see me in my present state. Herbert, Lord Dane! I can't believe it now."

"Indeed he is, sir; and has been for this ten years past."

"Is he liked?"

"Yes, very much. Not that he has given great opportunity to be liked or disliked, stopping away so long," added Ravensbird. "He has made himself popular since he did come back;

and he behaved generously in the matter of Lord Dane's will. The will left a large amount in presents and legacies, but my lord died before he signed it, consequently it was void. The new peer, however, fulfilled all the bequests to the very letter, as honourably as though he had been legally bound to do it."

"That was well."

"Fifteen thousand pounds were left to Lady Adelaide Errol: a large sum, but it was paid with the rest."

"Why did he not marry her?" rather sharply put in the invalid, as if forgetting his former question on the subject. "He was rich enough and great enough then."

"She turned round, sir, as I tell you, and would not have him. It was exactly like a sudden freak—a whim—unaccountable. My wife was maid to Lady Adelaide at the time, and she got to know of the refusal and told me, but we did not talk of it. In fact it was not generally known that there was ever anything between them."

"Perhaps there never was much."

"Oh yes, there was, sir; when he was plain

Herbert Dane," significantly replied Ravensbird.

"Ah, he little thought then, or my Lady Adelaide either, to be what he is now—the Lord of Danesheld."

"And he has not married, you say?"

"Not yet; and there's no heir. If he were to die, the title would be extinct. People think he may perhaps marry now, as he has come to settle down."

Mr. Home made no reply. He turned his face to the wall and put up his back; and nothing more was to be seen of him but his silvered hair, and the purple shade.

CHAPTER VII.


THE BOX THAT THE SEA CAST UP.

IT was a stirring scene ; none the less attractive from its elements of sadness ; and the sun shone down on it in all its brightness, as if in mockery. One might have thought a fair was being held on the heights at Danesheld, for people elbowed and jostled each other in their eager curiosity : rich and poor, old and young, gentle and simple—all had congregated there on the morning after the wreck : and if we did not speak of this scene quite in its consecutive order, it was because other things claimed our attention. Venturesome spirits had come out to the beach by daylight, but the heights were inaccessible then from the violence of the wind. It would have torn them to ribbons ; and indeed seemed inclined to try at it now, though some of its fierceness had abated. There she was below, the wreck of the once good ship, partially

visible at low tide, no doubt held fast by some concealed rock, and lying with her larboard side to the shore. Quantities of chips and pieces of wood were floating about; bits of iron might be discerned on the beach. The masts, the yards, the bowsprit were gone; all of her in fact that could go, save the old hull, which might disappear with the next tide. Mr. Bill Gand, an authority on such matters, gave it as his opinion that "nothing was left inside of her," meaning that stores, cargo, and passengers' luggage had alike been washed away; but that was not altogether a certainty. Something more appalling than wood or iron floated in occasionally: not near enough, however, to scare away the watchers on the heights, quite half of whom were of the timid sex.

Mr. Lydney was amidst them, very anxious: a box that had been on board contained valuable papers, and he did not care that it should be lost: he stood looking down, braving the dangerous wind.

Standing imprudently near the edge of the heights in their eager sympathy, their sad curiosity, were Miss Bordillion and Maria Lester. A



confused story had reached Maria's ears that morning of her brother's heroism ; she had hastened with it to Miss Bordillion's, and they came out together.

"Margaret, do you think it is true that papa shook hands with Wilfred, and begged him not to risk his life?" reiterated Maria in her eagerness, as they stood on the brow of the heights.

"My dear, you have asked me that question three times over, and I can but repeat to you that I do not know," calmly replied Miss Bordillion. "I had not heard it."

"I cannot help being anxious ; I do hope it is true. Why, Margaret, it might lead to a reconciliation between them."

"I'll tell you what I heard, Maria : that when Wilfred came in with his boat of rescued men, saved—he, Wilfred, I mean—as from the grave, and people were pressing round to clasp his hand in congratulation, Mr. Lester and Lady Adelaide held aloof, and observed a condemning silence."

"It is very unjust," cried Maria, passionately.

She took a step forward as she spoke, and bent over the heights, partly as a vent to her petulance,

partly to see what some noise might be about that had arisen underneath; wholly without thought. At that moment a gust of wind, more furious than any experienced for the past hour, swept over them, and Maria—

“Take care, Maria!” shrieked out Miss Bordillion, in an agony of terror.

Whether Maria *could* have taken care must remain a question. That the wind shook her, that she was on the balance—to stand or fall—was certain; when at the very moment of peril a strong arm was thrown around her, and unceremoniously snatched her back to safety. A moment's pause from all, and then Maria turned her face, white with terror, to her preserver. She had felt her own danger.

She saw a stranger. A gentleman about the age of her brother Wilfred, who had nobility stamped on every motion and lineament.

“I thank you very greatly,” she said to him from between her agitated lips. “I did not know the wind was still so high.”

“Let *me* thank you; let me thank you,” exclaimed Miss Bordillion, putting her hand into the

stranger's in her warm gratitude. "I do believe you have, under God, saved her from destruction. And you, Maria, how could you be so imprudent, so careless? You may well cry!"

For poor Maria, rather overcome altogether, had burst into tears; which, of course, she felt very much ashamed of, and hastened to dash away.

"Can't you thank this gentleman better than that?" cried Miss Bordillion, who had not, in her own confusion, noticed Maria's words. "There's no doubt he has saved you from death."

"Not from death so apparently certain as I was saved from last night," he said with a re-assuring smile, while Maria looked up to him from between her wet eyelashes with deprecating gratitude. "I was a passenger in that ill-fated ship," he added, in reply to the inquiring looks of Miss Bordillion, "and was one of those rescued by the life-boat."

"Is it possible!" cried Miss Bordillion. "We heard that only an old gentleman was saved, besides some of the crew."

"Yes, I was saved also. But for a gentleman

who took command of the life-boat, and shamed (as I hear) some sailors into manning her, we should all have perished. He was but a young landsman, but he showed a more courageous heart than the inured-to-danger sailors. I must find out where he lives, and thank him."


"Shall I tell you who it was—shall I show you where he lives?" spoke Maria, looking up to him in her impulse of love to the young landsman he spoke of—"it was my dear brother, Wilfred Lester."

The stranger smiled as he gazed down at the glowing damask cheeks, at the earnest eyes gleaming from their still wet eyelashes, and thought he had never seen a face half so beautiful.

"Lester? Yes, that is the name I heard."

Miss Bordillion interrupted the words: she was as much taken with the stranger as she had ever been at first sight with any one in her life, putting aside his having rescued Maria from peril.

"I am Miss Bordillion," she said; "the nearest relative Wilfred Lester and this young lady have, save their father. You will allow us to hear your name?"



“ William Lydney.”

And conversing onwards, in a few minutes it seemed as though they had known each other for years. There are seasons and events that break the barriers of restraint more effectually than time can do.

The next to come on the scene was Wilfred himself. The two young men clasped hands, and William Lydney spoke a few low, heartfelt words in the other's ear. “ I am thanking you for two,” he said ; “ for myself and the other passenger saved, who is now at the Sailors' Rest.”

Again Miss Bordillion interrupted, telling of the danger just incurred by Maria, and of Mr. Lydney's ready hand to save. Wilfred laughed.

“ It is tit for tat, then,” he said to their new acquaintance. “ If I saved you, you have saved my sister, so the obligation on either side is over.” But Mr. Lydney merely shook his head in reply : not there and then would he contest the proposition, or say how foolish it was.

The wind seemed to be increasing again, and Miss Bordillion and Maria were glad to leave the heights: Margaret giving her address to Mr.

Lydney, and with it a most cordial invitation to call upon her. He clasped her hand in return with what looked very like gratitude, and said he should not fail to avail himself of it.

As Miss Bordillion and Maria went through the town, their progress was perpetually impeded, everybody stopping to talk of the great event of the night. Amidst others, little Mr. Minn, the new tailor, standing at his shop-door, accosted them. He was a talkative little cockney, with a thin neck and sadly thin hands. He was full of the matter; and considered himself to have a personal interest in it, since one of the rescued passengers had distinguished him by an order for some clothes, which fact he recounted with pride to everybody he could get to listen to him.

"He don't stand at price, mem," said he to Miss Bordillion. "The things are to be of the very best; and I am to mind the cut, he says. He's one of the pleasantest gentlemen I've ever took the measure of, which mightn't be thought from his features. An haughty cast they've got."

"It did not strike me as being a haughty face. Mr. Minn," said Miss Bordillion. "He is alto-

gether a noble-looking man, both in face and form."

"Not haughty in expression, mem, which nothing can be pleasanter; but them high features always have an haughty cast about 'em. Look at Lord Dane's, for example. He wants the things home sooner almost than I can get 'em done, so I've put the steam on. That's his name, ladies."

Mr. Minn skipped to his counter, brought forth an open order-book, and pointed to an entry in his own handwriting, which was very small and crabbed. The ladies turned a glance upon it, and read, "William Lydney, Esq., Sailors' Rest."

As they turned from the sociable little tailor, Squire Lester happened to be passing. He was merely lifting his hat to Miss Bordillion, to whom he had been very distant since his son's marriage; but Margaret arrested him, telling of Maria's escape, and that the shipwrecked young man had "saved her life." Mr. Lester rather laughed at that; but reprimanded his daughter for being so imprudent. Lord Dane came up as they were speaking, and heard the news.

"Who is the young man, I wonder?" cried

Mr. Lester. "I must say a word of thanks to him, I suppose ; but that does not justify Maria's carelessness."

"He is some young American fellow," said Lord Dane, who had then come straight from his interview with Mrs. Ravensbird. "The old big man we saw lifted out of the life-boat last night, was also a passenger and an American."

"Relatives?"

"Oh no ; fellow-passengers only. I expect most of the people on board were Yankees," continued his lordship. "But I am glad he happened to be near *you*, Miss Lester."

"She would not be standing here now, had he not been," warmly observed Margaret Bordillion.

"What's his name?" asked Mr. Lester.

"Lindon ; or some such name," said Lord Dane.

"It is Lydney," corrected Miss Bordillion.

"Ah—yes ; Lydney. I know I remarked that it was an odd sort of name when Ravensbird's wife mentioned it to me just now."

"Some of those American names are odd

ones," carelessly observed Mr. Lester, as the speakers separated.

The days went on. The wind regained its usual composure, and Danesheld much of its usual quietness.

Properly-appointed people were busy striving to get up articles from the wreck: divers, the curious idlers called them. The preventive-men remained on active duty day and night, keeping guard over anything that might be rescued, so that no depredations could take place. The divers' exertions, however, appeared likely to meet, but with poor reward.

One visitor the beach constantly had; and that was the young stranger, Mr. Lydney. In fact, it may be said that he passed three parts of his day there, in anxiety after that missing box, already mentioned. One day, when Wilfred Lester had strolled down, he rallied him on his disquiet.

"One would think all your worldly wealth was entombed in that chest, Lydney. Does it contain gold?"

"Neither gold nor bank-notes," was Mr.

Lydney's answer. "But it contains very valuable deeds and documents, some of which could not be replaced to the owner."

"To the owner! Was the box not your own?"

"No; I was only in charge of it. The fact makes me doubly anxious."

"Suppose it never turns up! Would the loss be irremediable?"

"Upon my word, I cannot say. Some of its papers could be replaced; but others—I would rather not dwell on the possibility," he broke off.

"Well, I don't know; it seems to me, that the chance of its recovery is a very faint one," remarked Wilfred. "Ninety-nine against it, and one for it."

"True; but I am of a hopeful nature, and something whispers to me it will come up yet. A few boxes have been got up, larger than that."

"How large is it?"

"Not large. About two feet square; but it's heavy from its inward casing."

"Impervious to water, I suppose?"

"Quite so."

The two young men reached the spot where the divers were at work, and gazed down at the relics the sea had cast up. They were of various kinds; things most opposite, as may well be imagined. A part of a beam of wood; a gold Albert chain; a small cask which contained salt meat; a sealed case, holding letters; and a few boxes. Once, they thought they were hauling up a poor little baby, but it proved to be a huge wax doll, dressed in lace and satins; its young mistress was colder and more lifeless now than the doll.

With an eager step, when he saw a few fresh things, did William Lydney hasten to inspect them. Owners had been found for none; not for one of those articles lying on the beach. The owners had gone with the wax doll's little mistress, and would awaken no more in this world.

"Is it among them, sir?" asked the preventive-man, coming up as Mr. Lydney stood over the boxes; for his anxiety to recover the chest was no secret. "There's one japanned case, you see, sir, but I fear it's larger than you describe yours to be."

William Lydney lifted his head, his face expressing keen disappointment.

"It is not there," was all he said.

He and Wilfred Lester walked away together. They had become very friendly, and in the day might sometimes be seen arm-in-arm, as now. But Wilfred had never invited Mr. Lydney inside his house : his wife's ill-health was the ostensible excuse ; but in reality, it was a home of *want*, that might not be laid bare to strangers. The only house to which Mr. Lydney had been welcomed was Cliff Cottage. He had hastened to respond to Miss Bordillion's invitation, and soon became intimate there, almost going in and out at will. Thus he frequently saw Maria Lester—had more than once escorted her home in the evening, when there was no one else to do it. The time was to come when Miss Bordillion took terrible remorse to herself for this imprudent admission to intimacy of a stranger, of whom she knew positively nothing. The imprudence did not strike her now ; her eyes must have been held, she was wont afterwards to say when Danesheld reproached her and nearly drove her mad ; she, the ultra-particular Margaret

Bordillion. That Mr. Lydney was a thoroughly well-read man, a sound scholar, an accomplished gentleman, was indisputable; that there was a peculiar attraction in himself, and in his manners, was also true; Miss Bordillion had, unthinkingly, assumed all this to be an earnest of his worth, his truth, his honour—and that was the best that could be said of it. Unfortunately, it happened that another was also assuming it, and was, unconsciously, becoming fascinated—one to whom it could bring more danger than to Miss Bordillion. This, however, is rather anticipating.

“How long shall you remain in Danesheld?” questioned Wilfred Lester, as they left the beach and came in view of the Sailors’ Rest.

“How long will it be before the box turns up?” retorted Mr. Lydney. “I can’t go away without it.”

Wilfred just suppressed a shrug of the shoulders. In that case, his private opinion was that his new acquaintance would stop on for ever and a day.

“Does that old American get better?” he suddenly asked, as they halted at the door of the inn.

"Mr. Home? He is better, but not well. I think he fluctuates. There's some chronic complaint, I believe. He has not left his room."

"Good-day," said Wilfred. "Better luck to you."

He walked away, and Sophie, in her gossiping propensities, came out to the door. She, at any rate, had as yet found no fault in Mr. Lydney, for her manners to him were decidedly more respectful than at first.

"Is there any news yet, sir?" she asked in French.

"No," replied the young man, knowing that she alluded to the box. "I don't lose heart, though."

"Mr. Home has been asking twice, sir, whether you've come in, and whether there's any news. Minn has been up, taking his measure."

Mr. Lydney went straight to the invalid's room, to whom he was exceedingly attentive. He continued very unwell indeed, and he was making the young man's trouble about the box his own; it tended to excite him, and that was not good for the complaint under which he laboured.

William Lydney's hopeful trust did not mock him. On the day following this, when he went as usual down to the beach, he found the divers in the act of bringing up another relic. Mitchel, the preventive-man, now standing there on duty, was looking on.

"Is that it, sir?"

But the words were spoken as an exclamation, more than a question, for indeed the man, glancing at Mr. Lydney, did not need to ask it. Trembling eagerness, intense joy, was lighting up his face, proving the box to be in truth the one so coveted. In the moment's excitement he took it, he alone, from the grasp of those who bore it. William Lydney was a strong man, but scarcely strong enough to lift that heavy case in ordinary moments.

"It's him you've been looking for, ain't it, master?" came a diver's question, as it fell from Mr. Lydney's arms on the beach.

"Yes it is. You shall be rewarded well, my men."

It was a japanned box, about two feet square, just as Mr. Lydney had described it. The initials,

V. V. V., surmounted by a Maltese cross, were studded on it in gilt nails. Mitchel drew up and stood regarding it. He was almost as pleased as Mr. Lydney, of whom he had seen a good deal upon the beach. Mitchel's liking for him had begun when that gentleman brought him a handsome gratuity from his elderly fellow-passenger for the loan of the cloak the night of the wreck; and it had gone on for Mr. Lydney's own sake.

"Those are not your initials, sir," remarked Mitchel.

"I never said they were," returned Mr. Lydney, with a laugh.

"But the box is yours, sir."

"No, it is not. It is mine for the time being, in so far as that I was in charge of it. Just as I now leave you in charge of it, Mitchel," he gaily added, "while I go and get Ravensbird to send some men with a truck or barrow. Take you good care of it, for it's very precious."

"I'll take good care of it, sir," answered Mitchel, with a smile. "It's all in my duty and my day's work. Where you leave it there you'll find it, untouched."

You spoke there without your host, Mr. Preventive Mitchel !

Hardly had Mr. Lydney sprung away—with a light step and a lighter heart—when Lord Dane appeared on the scene. He was in a black velvet coat and dark leggings, his usual sporting attire, and many in Danesheld thought his fine figure never appeared to better advantage than when it was donned. His keeper had gone to the preserves with the guns and dogs, and Lord Dane was on his way thither also, but turned off for a moment to the beach, and came up to Mitchel. Mitchel stood over the things in pursuance of his duty, and over the box especially, as promised to Mr. Lydney.

“Is this all?” exclaimed Lord Dane, in an accent of surprise. “I thought they must have got up half the ship full. That young boy you call Shad came grinning up to me, saying the beach was covered.”

“A light-fingered young rascal,” apostrophised Mitchel; “I have just driven him off the beach. It would take a man with ten eyes to watch him. No, my lord, they have not got up

much, as you see, and I don't suppose they will. That box has turned up at last, that the gentleman has been in such a worry over. He said all along he was sure it would!"

"What gentleman?—what box?" inquired Lord Dane, who lived in a sphere altogether too exalted to become readily cognizant of the gossiping interest of temporary sojourners at the Sailors' Rest.

"That fine young man who was saved in the life-boat, and is staying at Ravensbird's, my lord. I should say nobody was ever so anxious over a drowned box before: as if it was full of thousand-pound bank-notes: and this morning it has turned up. That's it, behind your lordship."

Lord Dane turned round at the words, which brought him right in front of the box. He stood gazing at it. That something in it particularly attracted his notice, was apparent to Mitchel, for he remained 'as one transfixed. When he lifted his head, it was to walk round it, to attempt to lift it, to try to shake it: in short, he looked at it just as a curious child does at a new toy, and as


if he would very much enjoy the pulling it to pieces to see what was inside it.

“To whom do you say this belongs, Mitchell?”

“To that young American, my lord, who was brought ashore in the life-boat. Your lordship must have seen him about the place. A fine, handsome man, he is; pleasant to speak too. I mean Mr. Lydney.”

“Lydney—Lydney? Oh yes; I remember the man, now,” observed his lordship. “Lydney!” he repeated to himself. “The name does not at all strike upon my memory as one I’ve known. And he claims this box, does he, Mitchell?”

“Sure enough, my lord. It’s the one he has been in such a fever over. The letters don’t stand for his own name,” continued Mitchell, observing the peer’s keen glance at the nails, and fancying he discerned the drift of his thoughts. “I remarked to him at once that they didn’t, and he answered me, merrily like, that he had not said they did. He is gone to send a barrow to remove it to the Sailors’ Rest.”



Lord Dane stepped to the rest of the things, suffering his keen glance to linger on each one individually. The scrutiny ended, he turned to Mitchel.

“Does any of this belong to him?”

“No, my lord; nothing but that japanned box. He says he had a good bit of luggage on board, but he has not seemed in the least to care for any part of it but this box.”

Lord Dane walked away very quickly, and Mitchel remained on guard. Presently, somewhat to the coastguardsman's surprise, he saw Lord Dane coming back again, followed by an empty cart and two men. The cart belonged to a miller on the Dane estate, and had been on its way to fetch wheat to be ground. Lord Dane encountered it as he turned off the beach into the road, and commanded it into his own service, for what purpose you will see.

Down came the cart, its two attendants, and his lordship; halting close to Mitchel and the recovered débris. Lord Dane pointed to the things with his finger, and spoke curtly to the miller's men.

“Hoist them in.”

The men did so, to the wondering astonishment of Mitchel, and made short work of the process. None of the articles were heavy, save the japanned box. That went in with the rest; but the barrel of pork and the beam of wood his lordship told them they might leave on the beach. Then the cart and its contents proceeded to move away again, and Mitchel found his tongue.

“My lord,” cried he, in a perfect ecstasy of consternation, “they must not take off the things; especially that tin chest. I am left here to see that nobody does do it.”

“I have ordered them to the Castle for safety,” said Lord Dane.

“But that tin case, my lord—its owner is coming down for it directly. And I passed my word that he should find it here safe and untouched. If he complains to the supervisor I may lose my place, your lordship.”

“Lose your place for yielding to my authority!” returned Lord Dane, in a good-humoured tone, which seemed to chaff at Mitchel’s simplicity. “We don’t know yet to whom these things may

belong, and they will be in safety at the Castle."

"But—I hope your lordship will pardon me for speaking—this tin box has got its owner," persisted Mitchel. "When the gentleman returns for it, what am I to say to him?"

"Mitchel," replied his lordship, quietly, "you must understand one thing, which you do not yet appear to be aware of. As lord of the manor, I possess a right to claim all and everything fished up from that wreck, whether the original owners be alive or not. I do not wish to exert this privilege: I should not think of doing so; but I do choose that these things shall, for the present, be placed in the Castle, that they may be in safety. You may say that to Mr. Lydney."

The cart was half way off the beach by this time, and Lord Dane strode after it, leaving Mitchel mute and motionless, the image of a sudden petrification. The procedure did not meet his approbation at all, either on his own account or Mr. Lydney's. In defiance of the lord of the manor's assurance, he did not feel clear that no trouble would arise to him in consequence, and he was

sure it would anger Mr. Lydney. There he stood ; he did not speak, he did not move ; but just remained as he was, staring and wondering.

CHAPTER VIII.

UNACCOUNTABLY VANISHED !

DOWN came Mr. Lydney almost directly, Ravens-bird with him, and a man with a truck. The former cast his eyes around.

“Why, where are the things—where’s the box?” he exclaimed, turning about on all sides.

“Mitchel, what have you done with the box?”

“I don’t know,” replied Mitchel, speaking as helplessly as he looked. “I have not done anything with it. Lord Dane came down, and sent it away; and the other things also.”

“Sent it where?” asked Mr. Lydney.

“Up to the Castle, sir. He was lord of the manor, and possessed a right to claim what was got up from the wreck, he said. Not that he should think of claiming them, but they must be put in the Castle for safety till the owners turned

up—which, of course, they are never likely to do. But perhaps he meant their friends.”

“The owners of that jappanned box had turned up,” cried Mr. Lydney. “His lordship had no business to interfere, so much as to put his finger upon it. How could you think of allowing it, Mitchel? You are to blame.”

“If you were not a stranger here, sir, you would never ask how we can think of allowing sway to Lord Dane,” was the reply of the preventive-man. “He is master of everything; of Danesheld, and the people in it. I had no more power to keep your box back, when Lord Dane said it was to go, than I have to stop that sea from flowing.”

“Nonsense,” said Mr. Lydney, who appeared much provoked. “Lord Dane cannot be allowed to play the martinet over all the world.”

“Well, sir, I assure you it was no fault of mine,” answered the aggrieved Mitchel. “He happened to come on the beach and see the things, and he went and brought down Seel the miller’s empty cart, that I suppose he met, and sent the things away in it. He seemed quite struck with

your box, sir; I suppose he thought the cross on it looked odd."

"Mitchel, I tell you, you should not have allowed even Lord Dane to touch my box," said Mr. Lydney quietly. "I left it with you in trust; in trust, do you understand?"


"I'm more sorry than you can be, sir; and I wish Lord Dane had chanced to walk any other way than on to this beach," was poor Mitchel's answer. "But of course, he'll give it you up, sir, as soon as you apply for it."

"Not so sure, that," put in Ravensbird, who had listened in silence.

"Why?" asked Mitchel.

"Well—when my Lord Dane gets crotchety on the score of his own 'rights,' he's rather difficult to deal with," was the reply, Ravensbird having made a pause, as put, at the beginning of his explanation. "I don't think you'll get it readily, sir," turning to Mr. Lydney. "You'll have to go to work cautiously."

With a peculiar throwing up of the head, with a curl of the lip, that brought a look to the countenance fully justifying Mr. Minn's opinion of its



haughty cast, William Lydney strode off in the direction of the Castle. The man and the truck followed him, in obedience to orders. Ravensbird turned away to his own home.

Ringling a sounding peal at the gate, it was opened in the same minute by the butler, Bruff, who was still in the service, and happened to be coming forth.

“ I wish to see Lord Dane.”

“ His lordship is out, sir.”

“ I was informed he had just returned here, in charge of some property got up from the wreck. Let me in, if you please.”

Bruff looked at the speaker, who was thus presuming to speak in those scornful tones of Lord Dane and his doings: and Bruff came to the conclusion that no man had ever come to that Castle yet, possessing in an equal degree the bearing of a chieftain. Bruff bowed low, and threw wide the gate.

“ My lord did return here, sir, with the men who brought the things, but he went out again directly, as soon as they were put away.”

“ Among those things was a box, which I

claim," proceeded Mr. Lydney. "I must request you to deliver it to me."

"It is not in my power, sir. I dare not meddle with the things against the orders of Lord Dane."

"I say that I claim the box," quietly returned Mr. Lydney. "I must have it given up to me."

"I am sure, sir, when you remember that I am Lord Dane's servant, you will see how impossible it is that I can meddle with anything contrary to his lordship's orders."

"The things are in the Castle?"

"Certainly they are, sir. His lordship had them put in the death-room that they might be in safety: he gave me the key, and charged me not to let them be touched."

"The death-room!" echoed Mr. Lydney.

"I beg your pardon, sir, the strong-room, I ought to have said—as it is called now, the other not being agreeable. We used to call it the death-room, and the name comes more natural to me."

"Do you know that you may do me an irreparable injury by refusing to deliver up that property?" pursued Mr. Lydney.

“I am sorry to hear you say so, sir; and if it depended on my will, you should have it this instant: but this is a matter of duty to my lord, which I, receiving his wages and living under his roof, must not violate. He charged me not to allow any one access to the room, on any pretence whatever.”

Mr. Lydney felt at a nonplus. He could not avoid acquiescing in the good faith of the reasoning, and saw how useless it would be to argue the point further with the retainer.

“Is there any one who holds authority at the Castle, to whom I can apply?” he inquired.

“Miss Dane is at the Castle, sir, my lord’s sister; but as to authority—you can see her if you please, sir.”

The visitor motioned with his hand in reply, and Bruff ushered him indoors, and led the way up to the drawing-room.

“What name, sir?” he asked, pausing with his hand on the door.

“Mr. Lydney.”

Miss Dane was there, playing with a canary bird, and turned at his entrance. She had not

aged very much since you saw her, reader; the lines of the face were deeper, and the hair was perhaps a little thinner, but luxuriant still. She was older than her brother—I think this has been mentioned before—was, in fact, in her forty-second year, but would have gone into a fit of hysterics, had she supposed Danesheld remembered it. She assumed still the dress and manners of a girl of twenty. Her cheeks were pink, though perhaps less pink; her features were small and pretty; her brown glossy ringlets fell low on her neck, and her blue eyes had a habit of shyly shrinking from the gaze of other eyes, especially of gentlemen. Putting her vanity and her affectation aside, Miss Dane's real simplicity had something pleasing in it. She was attired in a light-blue silk gown and jacket to match, jointly set off with silver buttons. At the first moment, William Lydney really thought she was a young girl.

“I have the honour of speaking to Miss Dane?”

Miss Dane shut the canary bird in its cage, and curtsied and simpered and curtsied again.

She retained her old propensity for admiring attractive strangers, and had never seen one more attractive than he before her. "What a noble-looking man !" quoth she to herself, and fell right in love with him forthwith, hoping he was returning the compliment.

Mr. Lydney, however, was too much engrossed by his tin box and its abstraction to admit softer impressions just then, even though he had been as susceptible as the lady. He gave her a concise history of the affair, and inquired whether she would not issue orders that his box should be restored to him.

"I never heard of such a procedure," cried she, in her pretty little weak voice, as she shook her ringlets affectedly. "Geoffry — my brother — went down to the beach, and ordered the recovered things up here, you say? Why did he do that? What did he want with them?"

"That is precisely what I should be glad to know, Miss Dane."

"I don't think they can have come here, dear sir; I fancy there must be some error. Allow me to ring for Bruff."

She tripped to the bell before Mr. Lydney could forestall her ; and Bruff appeared in answer to the summons.

“Bruff,” asked Miss Dane, “have any boxes and things been brought here this morning belonging to that wrecked ship?”

“Yes, miss,” answered Bruff, for Miss Dane, though living at the Castle as its mistress, never would submit to be addressed as “madam.” It might have made her look old.

“Is this gentleman’s box here?”

“I suppose it is, miss, if it was in the cart with the rest of the things. They were all put in the strong-room.”

“It is of the very utmost consequence that I should have this box, Miss Dane,” struck in the claimant. “Lord Dane would surely not object to its being returned to me were he at home?”

“Of course not, sir,” warmly acquiesced Miss Dane. “Bruff, you cannot do wrong by giving up to this gentleman his own property.”

“My lord’s orders were that the things should not be touched under any pretence whatever, miss,” remonstrated Bruff.

“Yes, I can understand that. When there were no claimants for them, he naturally would wish them to remain in security. But this gentleman claims his box and requires it. You must give it to him, Bruff.”

“Not upon my own responsibility, miss,” returned the butler. “If you order me to do so, that of course alters the case.”

“Dear me, Bruff, how tiresome and precise you are !” ejaculated Miss Dane, with her childish simper. “It stands to reason that his lordship, in taking possession of the property, could only have had regard to the interest of the owners; therefore we cannot do wrong in delivering up to this gentleman what belongs to him.”

Mr. Lydney turned to Bruff. “It is a japanned box, with initials and a cross on the lid in gilt; you cannot mistake it. But I may as well go with you and point it out.”

But Mr. Bruff scarcely saw his way clear, even now. The man’s will was good enough to give up the box : he knew it ought to be given up ; but he did not care to risk his master’s almost certain dis-

pleasure. He stood looking almost as helpless as Mitchel had done.

"Miss Dane," he said at length, with much deprecation, "you know what my lord is, when disobeyed. Now, I really dare not deliver up this box myself; if you will do it, that's a different thing."

"But I am doing it, Bruff. I am ordering you to do it."

"Yes, miss, I know. Perhaps you'd not mind coming to the strong-room and taking the matter into your own hands. If you give up the box there to the gentleman, my lord can't well blame me."

Miss Dane did not mind it at all; she rather liked the expedition, especially when the handsome young stranger gallantly offered his arm as an escort. Down the broad staircase they went, leaving the fine hall to the right, and straight on through the passages to the strong-room, Miss Dane mincing and chattering as she walked. Bruff produced the key and unlocked the door.

The cold, grey room was just what it used to be; the floor of stone, the windows high; no fur-

niture whatever was in it, but the things from the wreck lay indiscriminately on the flags as they had been hastily thrown. Releasing Miss Dane with a bow, Mr. Lydney turned to the heap, his eye rapidly scanning the articles one by one. A look of stern anger arose to his face.

“ My box is not here ! ” he exclaimed.

It was a contretemps that neither Miss Dane nor Bruff had expected—and it may be the latter felt rather relieved by it than otherwise. Certainly no similarly-marked japanned chest was amongst the articles lying there. Mr. Lydney turned to the butler.

“ Where has it been carried to ? ” he demanded, and his voice, though perfectly quiet, bore an unmistakable sound of command to the man’s ear.

“ If it is not here, sir, it was not brought to the Castle,” was the prompt reply. “ The things were carried from the cart straight to this room, and I can be upon my word that nobody has been near them since.”

“ It was brought to the Castle safe enough,” returned Mr. Lydney. “ If you saw the things taken out of the cart, you must remember it.”

"A small japanned box you say, sir," cogitated Bruff, casting his thoughts back. "I don't remember to have seen it. The fact is, I took no particular notice of the things, though I can attest that they were all placed in this room."

"Then it has been removed since," was the rejoinder of Mr. Lydney.

Bruff shook his head. "Indeed, sir, I can equally attest that that could not be. The key has never been out of my own possession."

Mr. Lydney said no more. He felt sure the box *had* been removed, and he began casting his eyes around for hiding-places. They fell upon the door of a closet, and he pulled it open by the key which was in the lock. Save for a pair of trestles that leaned against the wall it was empty. There were no signs of the box.

"It is like magic," observed Miss Dane. "If the box was positively brought up in the cart, as you affirm, dear sir, the cart must have taken it away again; that's the only solution I can come to. My brother, hearing it was yours, may have sent it to your lodgings."

But this hypothesis was destroyed by Bruff,

who declared that when the cart drove away from the gate it was perfectly empty.

Mr. Lydney appeared to consider, and then inquired at what hour he could see Lord Dane. Bruff, and Miss Dane too, said there was no certainty of his being in much before the dinner hour. They were going to dine early that day—six o'clock.

Wishing Miss Dane good morning—to her great reluctance, for she'd have liked to keep so attractive a man by her all day—Mr. Lydney was shown out by Bruff, and went in search of the cart and the miller's men, Bruff having readily told him where he was likely to find them. He did find them without difficulty, but the fact did not serve him. They were a couple of dull, stupid clodhoppers, of that species of rustic whom we are apt to marvel at—to question, almost, whether they can be human beings. Possessing just sufficient brains to get through their day's work at the miller's, these two, and none beyond that.

A tin box, japanned, wi' gilt marks outside on't? They didn't know: my lord telled 'em to pick up the things what laid on the shingle and

take 'em to the Castle, and they did so. There couldn't be no box missing out of 'em, 'twarnt likely.

"But I tell you that it is missing," said Mr. Lydney. "As to your not recollecting it, if you lifted it into the cart, and then removed it from the cart to Lord Dane's strong-room, you must have observed it. It was a peculiar-looking box, very heavy."

The men could not remember. They moved the things for sartin themselves, but they didn't mark one thing more nor another. By token, my lord hisself had watched the cart safe up.

"And you left *all* the things at the Castle?" questioned Mr. Lydney.

They left 'em all, and come away with the empty cart to fetch their sacks o' wheat.

And nothing more tangible than this could William Lydney get from them : it was all they knew. And he went home to the Sailors' Rest in a mood anything but satisfactory.

Mr. Bruff entertained an idea that there was no policy equal to that of "taking the bull by the horns." Accordingly he quitted the Castle, after

the visitor's departure, and contrived to cross that portion of the Dane preserves where he deemed it most likely Lord Dane would be. Upon seeing him (as if by accident), he went boldly up and told his tale of the occurrences of the morning, deprecatingly dwelling upon the fact that the room had been opened by Miss Dane's orders, against his own remonstrance.

Lord Dane was sitting on the stump of a tree, solacing himself with a sandwich and something good from a flask. Bruff stood humbly before him, expecting little less than that his head would be snapped off. Few peers visited disobedience of orders more sharply than he of Dane.

"As a general rule, Bruff, you know that what I say is law, and may not be violated with impunity," cried his lordship with his mouth full. "In this instance the matter was not momentous ; but I shall speak to Miss Dane, who appears to have been more in fault than you. Did you give the young man his box ?"

"The box was not there, my lord ; leastways the one he said he was looking after," replied the amazed and relieved Bruff. "A tin box, japanned,

with gilt initials outside, he described it to be. There was nothing answering at all to the description, your lordship."

"Then what brought the fellow intruding after it?" cried his lordship, testily. "That's just what I expected it would be,—that every man, woman, and child, who might have ever so remote an interest in the ship, would be poking themselves up to view the relics; and it was for that reason I ordered you to keep the room closed. Let them go down with the divers, and hunt there."

"The young gentleman says the box was found and brought to the Castle, my lord," returned Bruff, believing Lord Dane was mistaking the facts. "But, as I told him, if the box came with the other things, there it would now be, with them."

"And of course it is with them," carelessly returned Lord Dane, taking a sip at the flask. "It could not sink through the stone floor. You must have overlooked it, Bruff."

"If I could overlook it, my lord, the gentleman wouldn't: he was too eager for it," was

Bruff's rejoinder. "He said he should call at the Castle and see your lordship about it."

"He is welcome to do so," replied Lord Dane, rising to resume his sport.

Bruff went home again. A little before six, Mr. Lydney again made his appearance at the Castle, and was shown into the great hall—or, as they more often termed it now, the audience chamber. Lord Dane sent word he would be down immediately. His lordship had but just got home from shooting, Bruff said, and was dressing. He soon appeared, and received the stranger with frank politeness. As they stood together, that young applicant and the lord of the Castle, one might almost have fancied a likeness between them; both were tall, fine, upright men, *noble* men, as they have already been called, and both had features cast in a noble form: Lord Dane was the best-looking according to the lines that are supposed to constitute beauty, but in the other countenance there was a good sense, a keenness of intellect, a nameless power, that might have adorned a face older than that of William Lydney.

"My butler has been telling me some rigmale story about a box vanishing out of the strong room," began his lordship, in a free, cordial tone. "But the thing is impossible. If the box was placed in the strong room, it must be in it still."

"The box was certainly put in the cart to be brought to the Castle,—to that Mitchel can testify," returned Mr. Lydney, in a tone as independent as his lordship's, though somewhat more haughty. And Lord Dane wondered who the young fellow could be, presuming to address him on an equality. "The question is, where was it put after it reached the Castle?"

"Did Mitchel take notice of the box?"

"Yes," emphatically replied Mr. Lydney. "And Mitchel says that your lordship also took notice of it; something passed about the initials on it not being those of my name."

"Is that the box that's missing?—the one with the three gilt V's upon it?" exclaimed Lord Dane. "Oh, that was certainly placed in the cart: I saw the men put it in."

"May I inquire why your lordship should have meddled with the box at all?"

"I had the things brought up for security," replied Lord Dane.

"But I had claimed that particular box, had left it in Mitchel's care, while I went for means to remove it ; and this was represented to you," said Mr. Lydney. "It appears to me that it could not be any concern of your lordship's. As to safety—Mitchel, I say, was in charge."

"Were you accustomed to see much of wrecks, which I do not imagine you are, you would know how next to impossible it is for any preventive-man to stop the pilfering of the marauders that infest the coast. It was my duty, as lord of the manor, to take care that the things, recovered, remained intact," continued Lord Dane loftily, for the benefit of the American ; who could not be supposed to know much about the rights of lords of the manor, or of lords either, for that matter.

"I want my property," said Mr. Lydney.

"And you are at liberty to take it," was the candid answer, spoken in a kind tone. "Bruff might have given it to you, under the circumstances, without waiting for my permission."

"But where is it?" questioned Mr. Lydney.

"it is not with the rest of the things brought up from the beach."

"Sir, to reiterate such an assertion makes me quite angry," tartly rejoined Lord Dane. "A box locked up safely in a strong-room could not vanish from it: it must be there still. I told Bruff so."

"It was not there to-day, when I was introduced into the room."

Lord Dane would not contend further. He opened the inner door of the hall and conducted his visitor to the passages, calling out to Bruff to bring the key of the strong-room. The butler did so, and the two gentlemen entered it together.

"Your lordship must perceive that the box is *not* here," said Mr. Lydney, pointing to the things as they lay on the floor.

Lord Dane glanced at them with a keen and curious eye. When he found beyond doubt that the box was really missing, he looked confounded, and appeared on the point of losing his temper. Striding to the door, he shouted out for Bruff, and the man came in haste. He knew the angry tone.

“Whom have you dared to admit to this room?” demanded Lord Dane. “This gentleman’s box must have been removed from it.”

“I declare to goodness, my lord, that not a soul has entered it except the gentleman himself and Miss Dane!” rejoined the unhappy Bruff, confused at the tables being turned on him in this unexpected manner. “The key never was out of my pocket. The box could not have been brought to the room.”

“To which other room was it taken?” asked Mr. Lydney quietly of Lord Dane.

“I assure you, on my word of honour, that every individual thing taken out of the cart was brought to this room and to no other,” was the peer’s emphatic answer; and even Mr. Lydney, prejudiced though he was, could but acknowledge that it sounded like a true one. “The men had no opportunity of entering any other, and did not enter one.”

“I can bear my lord out in that, sir,” interposed Bruff, turning his honest face upon the stranger. “The things were brought straight to this room through the outer passage, not the

inner one: had the men wished to go into another room, they could not have done it. Besides, I was with them all the time, and my lord also was looking on."

"I can surmise how it is," said Lord Dane: "the men must have omitted to remove the box from the cart."

"No," said Mr. Lydney. "I have questioned the men, and am satisfied that it was brought into the Castle."

"My lord," put in the butler, "I watched the cart go away from the gates, and it was quite empty."

"Well, I cannot understand it," returned Lord Dane, half testily, as if he would give up the affair for a bad job. "I can certainly affirm that the box was put in the cart; I saw the men lift it in, and thought how heavy it seemed to be; and I can also affirm, if necessary, on my oath, that everything in the cart was brought direct to this strong-room. The men must have lost it en route."

"Did your lordship notice the box after the cart got here?" asked Mr. Lydney.

"No, I did not; I paid no particular attention to the things then. The truth is, I was impatient to be gone, for my keeper had been waiting for me some time. Were its contents of value? You appear to set great store by it."

"Its contents were of great value: they consisted of documents which cannot be replaced."

"Was it your own box?"

"It was not mine; but I was in charge of it, and am responsible to the owner, who entrusted it to me in America."

"Who is the owner?" asked Lord Dane, some curiosity in his tone.

"That question is superfluous to the present matter," was the reserved and haughty answer.

Lord Dane smiled.

"I allow for your vexation, sir, and all I can say is, that I hope the box will soon be found. Lost it cannot be."

"It shall be found, if there be law or justice in England," warmly spoke the young man.

"A moment, sir. You appear to cast blame on me; surely that is not just."

"It is in my nature to be candid, even where

unpleasant suspicions are concerned, and therefore I avow my opinion that your lordship has custody of the box," was young Lydney's bold rejoinder, and Mr. Bruff stared to hear it. "Had it been lying on the beach unclaimed, as the other things were, when you ordered it to the Castle, I could have understood it; but that you should do so in the face of Mitchel's assurance that it was mine, and that I was then bringing assistance to remove it, does appear to me to be a procedure fraught with doubt. I can only believe that your motive was to obtain possession of the box, and that you have yourself removed it from the room."

"Why! what do you suppose I wanted with the box?" exclaimed Lord Dane.

"I am unable to say."

"You are smarting under this loss, young sir, which I confess is a vexatious one, and therefore I excuse your language," returned his lordship with equanimity. "Perhaps you have not reflected how void of foundation your suspicions must of necessity be. That the things were all brought to this room I have testified to you; my servant has done the same, and you say you have

questioned the miller's men. Now, this room is not near the other rooms in the Castle : it is some distance from any one of them ; and I ask you how it would be possible for me to carry a heavy box, which most likely I could not even lift, through the passages. You may be capable of deeming that my servants helped me, or carried it by my orders ; but I give you hearty leave to question them. No, Mr. Lydney, I saw the things put down in this room, and I locked the door upon them, and gave the key to Bruff. Since then their safety lies with him."

Bruff looked up deprecatingly, but did not again defend himself. He thought it very unreasonable of the gentleman to cast suspicion on his master, but excused it on the score of his youth and inexperience.

There was nothing to be gained by lingering in the strong-room, and Mr. Lydney quitted it, Lord Dane following, and Bruff remaining to lock the door. Mr. Lydney was sorely perplexed, and it may be that the good sense of Lord Dane's defence was making its way within him. Only—where could the box be ?

He had to return to the hall, for he had left one of his gloves there. Standing just inside it, close to the dining-room door, was Miss Dane, apparently having run in after a little pet dog, in reality watching for the handsome stranger. Her ringlets were now interspersed with hanging blue ribbon, and her white muslin dinner dress, sweeping the beautiful mosaic pavement, was made in a girlish fashion, and also decorated with blue.

"What a fine room this is!" was the involuntary exclamation of William Lydney, not at the first moment perceiving Miss Dane.

"Ay! it is that; it's the boast of the county," observed Lord Dane.

Miss Dane came forward with a little start of surprise, dropping her hands and her eyes like a timid child.

"Oh, dear sir! is it you again? Oh, I do hope you have found your box!"

"It cannot be found," was the answer. "It appears to have vanished in some unaccountable manner from Lord Dane's strong-room."

"Vanished as the ghosts do," she said, with a pretty simper.

"Exactly. Only that the days of ghosts are over, Miss Dane."

She put out her hand when he was bowing his adieu, and he frankly met it, and gave it a hearty shake. Lord Dane drew down the corners of his lips at the young man's presumption. If his sister was absurd, he had no right to take advantage of it; and would not had he been a gentleman, was the peer's thought. He condescendingly bowed him out of the hall on his own score, and into the charge of Bruff.

"Is his box quite gone, Geoffry?" sighed Miss Dane, gently shaking back her curls and her blue ribbons.

"Gone! It can't be gone. It seems to have disappeared in some inexplicable manner."

"What a pity! Geoffry, did you ever see any one so good-looking before?"

"H—m," returned Lord Dane, laughing at his sister. "Not a bad figure, though."

"Of whom does he put you in mind, Geoffry?"

"I can't think. He does put me in mind of some one; there's no doubt of it."

"It's in his face," she cried. "It is like Lady Dane's, Geoffry."

"What Lady Dane's?" exclaimed Geoffry in surprise.

"I never knew but one, Geoffry. Old Lady Dane, my aunt and yours."

"Nonsense, Cecilia!"

"But, Geoffry dear, it isn't nonsense. I've rarely seen such a likeness in my life. It struck me when he first came in."

Poor Cely! As Lord Dane took her kindly on his arm to lead her into the dining-room, he thought what a very many foolish things had struck her in the course of her simple life.

"I wish you had asked him to stay dinner, Geoffry!"

"Ask *him* to stay!" echoed Lord Dane. "My dear Cecilia!"

"Wouldn't it do, Geoffry?"

"No, indeed it would not do," said Lord Dane. "A doubt is dawning on my mind, Cecilia—and I have cause for it—whether this young American, this Lydney, is not an adventurer: a

man who may have come into the town to pick up what he can."

"Oh, Geoffry! But he is so good-looking! He is like a prince."

"That's just it. I fancy he means to trade on his good looks."

Miss Dane gave vent to a cry of mortification. It was genuine; not affected, as her cries were in general. She knew how clear-sighted her brother was; how generally right in his judgment; how charitably-judging as a rule; and therefore she accepted the opinion as a fiat. But, apart from it, she had never seen any stranger in whom she could have put so much trust as in William Lydney.

CHAPTER IX.

SEARCHING DANE CASTLE.

BRUFF meanwhile was showing out the same, adventurer or gentleman, whichever he might be. The butler felt a little uncomfortable at this singular disappearance, and could not allow Mr. Lydney to go without attempting an excuse.

“I hope, sir, you do not attribute this loss to any fault or carelessness of mine?”

“I do not,” was the ready answer. “But you must admit that the disappearance of the box is strange in the extreme.”

“I can’t make it out in any way, sir. Turn it about as I will, there’s no opening for a probability to creep in at.”

“Lord Dane delivered the key to you immediately after the things were put in the room?”

“That he did, sir,” was Bruff’s hearty answer.

“After the men had put the things in, I followed them to the gate, and saw them drive away with the empty cart. I then turned back along the passage to the room, and there stood my lord, outside the door, waiting for me. He locked the door just in my sight, gave me the key, and charged me to allow no person to enter. He went out as he spoke, and returned but now : and as for the key, it has not been out of my pocket, except when I opened the door for you and Miss Dane. Now, sir, even allowing that my lord had an inclination to remove that box elsewhere, as you seem to suspect, he could not by any possibility have had the time, either to do it himself, or to get it done : and my own moral persuasion is, that the box never did come into the Castle. I should not say so much, sir, but for your thinking my lord must be in fault : which he never could have been.”

“At any rate, I do not think you are in fault,” Bruff,” was the rejoinder, given with a pleasant smile, and Mr. Lydney slipped a heavy piece of gold into the man’s hands.

“Oh, sir, indeed you are too good. I——

Halloa, you young eavesdropper! What do you do here?"

The interrupting words were addressed to a boy, lingering in close proximity to the Castle gate. It was Shad. Mr. Lydney turned hastily, and thought he had never seen so queer-looking a specimen of young humanity. The butler pointed his finger of authority, and the boy shuffled off.

"Had the box been light, I might have thought that young reptile had pilfered it from the cart," observed Bruff. "He must have stolen up after the cart when it came here from the beach, for I saw him hovering close by as the men were taking the things from it. A box of that weight of course he could not take."

Mr. Lydney strode away, overtook Shad, and laid his hand upon his shoulder. "What is your name?" asked he.

"Please, sir, it's Shad."

"Shad—what? What's your other name?"

"Please, sir, I never had none."

"The divers recovered some things this morning from the wreck, and a cart took them up to

Dane Castle. You followed it, I believe. Did you see the cart unloaded?"

"I didn't finger nothing," was the response of the boy.

"That is not what I asked you. *Can* you speak truth?" proceeded Mr. Lydney, a doubt crossing him whether one possessing such a countenance, as that he was gazing on, could speak it.

Shad made no reply, except that his wide mouth parted with a sort of grin.

Mr. Lydney took a sixpence from his pocket, and held it up. "You see this, Shad? I am going to ask you a question or two; answer me with strict truth, and it shall be yours. Equivocate only by a word, and instead of the sixpence, you shall get something not so pleasant."

"I know what you'd ask me," burst forth the boy, forgetting his usual *rôle* of 'simpleton' in the eager fascination the sixpence bore for him. "It's about your lost box, that a row's being made over, her with the three brass letters on it, and t'other thing a top of 'em. I see it took into the Castle."

"You did?"

"I see it with these two eyes o' mine," avowed Shad, lifting his sly orbs, sparkling now, to the face of Mr. Lydney. "It was a'most the last thing left in the cart; the two millers carried of it in, and Mr. Bruff went a'ter 'em up the passage."

"Where was Lord Dane then?"

"I didn't see him. I think he was agone into the Castle afore."

"What made you follow the cart to the Castle?"

"'Cause Mitchel had druv me off the beach, and I'd got nothing to do. I didn't follow it for no harm. I see 'em unload it, and I see it go away empty."

"You are sure it was empty?"

"I'se certain: there warn't a thing left in her," replied the boy, earnestly. "Master, I've telled ye the truth, and now, please, for the sixpence."

"Should I find later that you have not told the truth, it shall go hard with you," said Mr. Lydney, dropping the sixpence into his hand. "But if you could only learn, Shad, how much better it is to speak truth than the contrary, what a vast amount

of trouble it saves, you would never say another false word again."

Shad's only reply was to shamle off, his arms flinging themselves about in wild delight at the possession of the sixpence: and Mr. Lydney went down to the Sailors' Rest. There he at once sought an interview with his elder fellow-traveller, and asked his advice on the state of affairs. Ravensbird was called into the room, and certain questions were put to him, chiefly touching on the disposition and habits of Lord Dane.

Mr. Home's opinion—sitting there in his purple shade while he gave it—was, that Lord Dane had taken possession of the box; had got it somewhere concealed. A doubt certainly crossed him, whether it might not have been abstracted, while the cart was on its way to the Castle, by some light-fingered gentry, plenty of whom, Ravensbird said, prowled about Danesheld; and this doubt also arose to Mr. Lydney.

"It was a conspicuous-looking box, you see," the latter observed to Mr. Home; "the gilt cross and the initials rendered it so. I am, therefore, surprised—if the box really did go to the Castle—

that the butler, Bruff, should not have noticed it. Lord Dane also says he did not observe the box amidst the things when they got to the Castle."

"If Lord Dane be concealing the box for any purpose of his own, he, of course, would not confess to having seen it there," remarked Mr. Home. "Landlord, what do you think?"

"I think it amounts to this, sir: has Lord Dane a motive for getting hold of the box, or not? If he has, why then no doubt he has secured it; if he has not, I should be inclined to fancy it was abstracted from the cart on its way to the Castle."

"There's a suspicious phase in the affair, and it's one I can't get over," said William Lydney, warmly, to Mr. Home; "and that is, the ordering the box to the Castle at all. Mitchel told Lord Dane the box was claimed by me, that I had gone off the beach to get assistance to move it away, but, nevertheless, he conveyed it at once to the Castle, and that in the teeth of a remonstrance Mitchel ventured to speak. I'd lay any money he has got the box."

But, even allowing this hypothesis to be correct,

what was to be done? Mr. Lydney felt himself in the position of a bird with its wings clipped. Lord Dane was Lord Dane; a great man, not be approached lightly, or accused without due reason; and he really appeared to know nothing of the box. William Lydney walked about the invalid's room in a fever of restless uncertainty, and the commotion could not have been altogether agreeable to the elder man.

"What would you advise, sir?" he suddenly asked.

"If you'll sit down quietly, I'll tell you," answered Mr. Home. "I incline to the belief that my Lord Dane has the box; and in that case—I can't talk unless you sit down."

Young Lydney closed the door, and sat down, stilling his restlessness in the best way his impatience allowed. They were alone then, for the landlord had been called away; and Mr. Home quietly discussed the matter, and tendered his opinion and advice. And as he talked, the younger man became more fully impressed with the conviction that the box was in Dane Castle, in the secret keeping of its lord. He did not ask himself how this could

be, in the face of the improbabilities mentioned by Bruff; he only succeeded in persuading his own mind that it was so.

Later in the afternoon he took his way to Danesheld Hall, on a mission to Squire Lester, and met that gentleman coming out of it with Lady Adelaide. The carriage waited at the door, and they were apparently in a hurry.

"I fear I have come at an unseasonable hour," remarked Lydney. "I wished to speak with you, Mr. Lester, on a matter of business."

It happened that Lady Adelaide had not met the young stranger before. She had seen him in the street, and thought him a very attractive man. Attractive men had charms for Lady Adelaide still, in contradistinction to unattractive ones, and she was gracious to Mr. Lydney now.

"I hope your business can wait," she said. "Mr. Lester is going out with me, and we are already late. Will this evening not do for it?"

"Certainly, it shall do," replied Mr. Lydney.

"Step in this evening then, Mr. Lydney," added Squire Lester. "Any time; eight o'clock

or nine : when you like. Lady Adelaide will give you a cup of tea."

Mr. Lester's feeling towards young Lydney was a kindly one. He had thanked him for the service rendered to Maria, and a speaking acquaintance had grown up between them. Mr. Lester supposed him to be a gentleman ; otherwise, he would never have dreamt of giving the invitation just proffered.

And between eight and nine William Lydney duly arrived. But as the servant was showing him to the drawing-room, he arrested the man's steps, saying that he would first of all see his master in private. So he was taken to Mr. Lester's study, and that gentleman came to him.

"It is not a very seasonable hour for business, and I must ask you to excuse my entering on it," observed young Lydney, as they shook hands, and sat down. "You are, I believe, in the commission of peace for the county?"

Mr. Lester nodded.

"Then I have to proffer a request, which—which will, perhaps, surprise you ; but nevertheless,

I hope you will accede to it. I want you to grant me a warrant to search Dane Castle."

Had Mr. Lester been asked for a warrant of search for his own house, he could not have evinced more intense surprise. For a few moments he only stared at the applicant.

"Search Dane Castle!" he echoed.

Young Lydney entered on the explanation. The unaccountable loss of the box was already known to Mr. Lester, as it was to all Danesheld, for the place had forgotten none of its propensity for tale-bearing.

"Rely upon it, Mr. Lester, that box is in Dane Castle, purposely concealed there."

If anything could have added to Mr. Lester's surprise, it was that assertion. But he resented the insinuation.

"What grounds can you possibly have for such an opinion?" he questioned, in a tone of remonstrance.

"I draw my deductions from facts," was the reply. "What right had Lord Dane to interfere with that box at all? Mitchel told him it was mine; that I was most anxious about the box, that

I had gone to send people to fetch it up to the inn where I was staying. In the face of that, he took possession of it, and sent it to his Castle. I ask what his motive could have been?"

"I do not myself see any necessity there was for his doing so," reflectively replied Mr. Lester. "As to his motive, it must have been zeal—over zeal that no harm should come to the things—your box among them. He can have no reason for detaining or concealing your box. If it were in his hands he would be only too glad to hand it over to you as the claimant."

"One would think so," was the reply, tinged with a tone of sarcasm.

"Were I to hazard a conjecture, I should say the box fell from the cart unseen, on its way to the Castle."

"I think that would scarcely be your conjecture did you know how heavy the box is, Mr. Lester. It could not well fall unseen or unheard; and one of the men walked behind the cart. Lord Dane, as I hear, was also behind, keeping the cart in view. This supposition may be put wholly

aside, for the box was seen to be carried into the Castle."

Mr. Lester pricked up his ears. The last bit of information was new to him.

"Seen! By whom?"

"A somewhat noted young gentleman of your vicinity, Shad by name, saw it taken in there."

Squire Lester interrupted with a burst of laughter. "Pardon me, Mr. Lydney, but the remark proves what a stranger you are. Shad! Why, he is the falsest boy you can conceive; he tells more lies in an hour than anybody else would in a lifetime. I doubt if he ever spoke a word of truth yet, knowing it to be truth."

"I agree with you in all that," replied Mr. Lydney, who had sat perfectly composed until the laugh was over. "My landlord has told me what he is; and from my own limited observation of the boy, I should judge him to be an exceedingly bad boy, an habitual and systematic deceiver. Nevertheless, I avow to you my belief that in this instance he has told me the truth. He says the two men carried the box into the Castle, it being

nearly the last thing taken out of the cart, and that Lord Dane's butler followed them in."

"But I thought you convinced yourself that the box was not in the Castle?"

"I convinced myself that it was not with the rest of the things. That it was taken into the Castle, I feel certain."

"Then what can have become of it? You surely don't suspect any of the servants of having cribbed it?" hastily added Mr. Lester. "Bruff is as honest as the day; a most respectable man; was butler to the late lord."

"I do not suspect the servants. By what I can gather, none of them, except Bruff, went near the things."

It was an unlucky admission of Mr. Lydney's. Taking away all semblance of a plea for the granting of the search-warrant; at least in the opinion of the magistrate before him.

"Then whom do you suspect?" rejoined Mr. Lester, fixing his eyes on the young man. "Surely not Lord Dane?"

"It is a nice question, Mr. Lester; one that I am not entirely prepared to answer. I do believe

the box to be in Dane Castle, either inadvertently concealed there, or purposely concealed, and therefore I am asking you to grant me a warrant to search for it."

"I cannot grant it you," replied Mr. Lester. "I am sorry to refuse it; but—putting other considerations aside—I really believe neither the law nor the circumstances would justify it. All the evidence you have, that the box went into the Castle, is from that Shad; scarcely one upon whose word we could venture to thrust the insult of a search-warrant upon Lord Dane. Besides, I am not sure but he would have power, as the lord-lieutenant, to draw his pen down it. You'll never get it from me or any other magistrate. And now let us go and have some tea."

Lord Dane was in the drawing-room with Lady Adelaide and Miss Lester. He had come to spend the evening, and learnt that Squire Lester was just then engaged with Mr. Lydney.

"With Mr. Lydney!" echoed his lordship. "Oh, ay; the young American fellow lodging at the Sailors' Rest;" and there was a scornful, patronising tone in his comment that somehow

caused Maria's cheeks to burn. "What is his business with Mr. Lester?"

"I know nothing about that," said Lady Adelaide. "We asked him to come to us for an hour this evening."

"Here? Lydney!" was the surprised question.

"Yes."

Lord Dane drew down the corners of his lips, and mentally wondered in what sort of guise the American would present himself to the evening society of English gentlewomen.

His doubts on the point were speedily solved. Mr. Lester came in, and his guest with him, in evening attire of plain black, as orthodox and simple as my Lord Dane's.

Again, let it be remarked, they did not look unlike each other, allowing for the difference in age. Of the same good height; of the same noble cast of feature; wearing the same sort of quiet black clothes; and each, as it happened, the same shade of gloves, lavender. Maria Lester's heart fluttered when Mr. Lydney shook hands with her as it had never fluttered for Lord Dane.

It may as well be stated that Lord Dane had not as yet spoken formally to Miss Lester, or personally urged his own claims. That she knew he wished to prefer such, he was aware ; but her manner gave him no encouragement, and he deemed it well to wait a little.

She was a fair prize. None could feel that more deeply than Lord Dane felt it as she stood before him on this night, in her evening dress of light-blue silk, with a necklace and bracelets of crystal set in gold, and a single white rose in her hair. Far more lovely in Lord Dane's eyes than even Lady Adelaide had been in those bygone days. Adelaide Errol had never possessed the sweet countenance, the gentle spirit, that characterised Maria Lester.

One thing gave displeasure to Lord Dane, and that was the manner of Mr. Lydney. Far from appearing to feel his inferiority of position, he held his own just as though he were an equal. Had he been ennobled, as my Lord Dane himself, his manner could not have been easier. He seemed accomplished, too, at least in music ; played with a soft and skilful touch, sang with the quietest and

sweetest melody. Lord Dane came to the conclusion that he had probably been a music-master.

Lady Adelaide suddenly asked if he could sing a certain duet; he said yes, if Miss Lester would sing it with him and take the accompaniment. Maria sat down to the piano.

"A trifle quicker than you played it last night," said Mr. Lydney to Maria, as he bent over her to look at the music.

"Quicker?"

"I think it would be better."

Lord Dane, standing close by, caught the colloquy, and rather opened his eyes. "Were you singing this with Mr. Lydney last night?—here?" he inquired of Maria.

"Not here; at Miss Bordillion's," said Mr. Lydney, answering for her.

And the answer by no means pleased Lord Dane. It was not at all the thing for Miss Lester, whether as the daughter of Mr. Lester of Danesheld Hall, or as his future wife, to be subjected to the chance companionship of unknown young Americans, cast up by the sea; especially of those who assumed the manners of gentlemen.

“What do you know of him?” abruptly asked Lord Dane of Mr. Lester, when the evening came to an end, and Mr. Lydney had departed.

“Know of him? Nothing. The young fellow called here about his lost box, and I asked him to come in to tea.”

“Is it wise of you to admit a stranger indiscriminately?”

“Oh, I don't know,” indifferently answered Mr. Lester, who hated music and was feeling tired to death. “It's only once in a way. I dare say he'll never be inside the house again. But I think he's a gentleman.”

The morning came. And Mr. Lydney, bearing in mind a remark of Squire Lester's, that he would not get a magistrate to grant a search-warrant for Dane Castle, went direct to the police station and asked to see the chief officer. It was a commodious station, newly built, containing cells for refractory prisoners, and a good-sized front room, in which was a railed-off compartment containing two chairs and a desk, and taking in one of the windows; the windows looking out on

the street and the opposite shop of Minn the tailor.

Mr. Bent was at Danesheld still : formerly sergeant, now inspector. He had grown portly, and was bald on the top of his head. Bent, however, was not in when Mr. Lydney called, and one of the subordinates invited him to a chair inside the rails, and listened to what he had to say. The purport of the application was the lost box ; and a demand that Dane Castle should be searched for it.

The policeman shook his head with a faint smile. He could not take the responsibility of answering such an application himself, he observed, but he would report it to his superior, and the gentleman had better call again.

Little was William Lydney acquainted with the usages of the neighbourhood, and with Lord Dane's sway in it, if he supposed the police could receive such an application and not make his lordship acquainted with it. The inspector himself carried it to the Castle in the course of the day, and Lord Dane accorded him a private interview.

" Search the Castle, forsooth !" ironically cried

Lord Dane. "Search it for what? For that lost box of his? Does the American suspect my servants?"

Mr. Bent presumed that the American did.

"It were more to the purpose that he permitted himself to be searched, for who he is, and for what he is," cried his lordship angrily. "Look at the facts, Bent. Here's a Yankee saved from a wreck with what he stands upright in; he is taken for shelter to a public-house and remains in it; dresses himself up in new clothes like a gentleman, and worms himself into the best houses in the neighbourhood. All very well this, provided he is a gentleman; but who is to prove it? He is perfectly silent as to his antecedents; has been asked of them, to my knowledge, but does not answer; and I say it is altogether fraught with suspicion. How can we know that he is not an adventurer, a *chevalier d'industrie*? For my own part, I believe him to be one; I have my reasons for thinking so. He spent last evening at Squire Lester's."

Mr. Bent, who had gained experience and was moreover a tolerably shrewd man, was struck with

the argument. Coming, as it did, from Lord Dane, it made all the more impression on him.

“He has become positively intimate at Miss Bordillion’s—intimate,” went on the peer impressively, “and possibly so at other houses. He came up here, to the Castle, and got admitted to my sister, just as boldly as though he carried credentials in his hand.”

“Why there’s no knowing what it may end in, your lordship, if the man is really an adventurer!” exclaimed the dismayed inspector.

“It will end in the neighbourhood’s having cause to repent its credulity; at least, that is my opinion,” said Lord Dane. “Stay, don’t go yet, Bent; we have not finished about this box that he claims: a box which he acknowledged to me was not his own; between ourselves, it is just as likely to have belonged to some other passenger, who is gone where he can’t claim it.”

Summoning Bruff, Lord Dane went with Mr. Bent to the strong-room. The butler unlocked it, and Lord Dane pointed to the things on the floor.

“Here the things are, Bent, lying just as they

were thrown down yesterday. Does it stand to reason that if the box had been put here, it could have vanished of itself?—and Bruff will testify to you that no one could have got in to remove it; he has not suffered the key to go out of his own possession. Why, it was not, as I hear, five minutes after the articles had been brought in, that this Lydney came, and he saw for himself that the box was not amidst them. Who is to know that he did not contrive to get it off the cart himself, and is making this to-do to throw the police off the scent? No end of unpleasant suspicions are suggesting themselves to my mind.”

As they were to Mr. Bent's. “A pretty fellow, my lord, to talk of getting a search-warrant for the Castle!”

“I'd see him hanging from the yard-arm of the tallest ship in the harbour before he should execute it,” haughtily spoke his lordship.

And Mr. Bent nodded his head approvingly.

“But,” resumed Lord Dane, “I am far from wishing to impose the same restriction on the police. If you, Bent, would like for your own satisfaction, to go through every room and examine

every nook and corner of the Castle, you are at liberty to do so. Bruff will guide you, or you may go alone, just as you please. Here's the trestle-closet," he added, throwing open the door. "Begin with that."

"Certainly not, my lord, I should not think of doing so. Unless it would be for your lordship's satisfaction," added Bent, a thought striking him. "Your lordship does not cast a doubt on any of the servants?" he added in a low tone. "The men, down yonder at the station, thought that must be what the American was aiming at."

"No, I do not cast suspicion on my servants," coldly returned Lord Dane. "But there, you had better go through the Castle," he concluded, "it will set the matter at rest."

And accordingly Inspector Bent did go through the Castle, searching it thoroughly, but found no trace of the lost box. Lord Dane's manner had changed to one of chilling hauteur when the officer rejoined him.

"Look you, inspector. When this man—Lydney, or whatever his name may be—shall presume to speak to you again of a search-warrant

for Dane Castle, inquire a little as to who he may be himself, and what he is doing here."

"I will, your lordship."

"Understand me, Bent," said his lordship, thawing a little, "you have my private orders to do this. I wish to know who and what the fellow is."

And as Mr. Bent walked back to Danesheld, he weighed the affair over in his own mind, and came to the conclusion that Lord Dane's view, of there being much to doubt in the conduct of this young Lydney, was a correct one.

CHAPTER X.

APPLYING TO INSPECTOR BENT.

THE shades of evening were gathering on the wood at Danesheld as Maria Lester walked quickly through it with her brother. Once more she had transgressed home mandates, and gone to see Wilfred's wife; and the visit had been productive of a pain she scarcely cared to conceal. Things seemed to be getting worse in their cottage home: Wilfred's reputation was not getting better.

"Is there nothing that you can do?" she suddenly asked, her feelings winding themselves up to a pitch of fear and despair that rendered silence intolerable. "Try and get a situation of some sort—no matter what; anything that will enable you to earn a trifle. Throw pride to the winds."

"Pride!" he repeated, in a questioning tone,

as if he and pride had no longer much to do with each other. "What situation would you suggest?" he added, with sarcasm. "I have thought of several, but nothing comes of it. I cannot open a general shop, wanting funds; I cannot engage myself as keeper to Lord Dane—there's no vacancy; I don't suppose I should get hired if I offered myself as footman to my father, to replace the one I hear is leaving."

"How can you turn what I say into ridicule?" rejoined Maria. "I did not mean places of that sort,"

"You meant, no doubt, something more suitable to a gentleman," he rejoined. "I am not eligible for it—possessing no clothes!"

"Oh, Wilfred! No clothes!"

"Except this velveteen suit," giving the short tail of the coat a twitch forward, "everything else is put away; and I may have to put in this, if they'll take it, and go about scandalizing Danesheld in shirt sleeves."

Her cheeks were crimson, the tears rested in her eyes. She had suspected all this, and more; but it was not pleasant to have it put point-blank

before her. And his tone of mocking recklessness troubled her worse than all.

“A little bird whispered to me, Maria, that you were likely to marry Lord Dane,” he resumed, his tone changing to one kind and serious. “Is it true?”

Her face flushed all over. “Little birds are a great deal more busy than they need be?”

“I have no right to interfere, I suppose. But, Maria, I would have you think twice ere you tie yourself to Lord Dane. He is nearly double your age. Do you care for him?”

“No, I don’t care for him, Wilfred—not in that way. I like Lord Dane very much as an acquaintance, but I should not like to be his wife. He has not asked me yet.”

They came to the end of the road, and Maria said good evening, and hastened onwards, for the dinner-hour was at hand. The emotion she would not give way to before her brother took its own way now, and for a moment the tears rained down her cheeks. An unlucky moment: at the turning near the Hall, she met a foot-passenger face to face, and it was William Lydney. Maria brushed

away the tears, and spoke in a gay tone, carrying off matters in the best way she could.

"Have you found your box yet, Mr. Lydney?"

"No," he replied, turning to walk by her side. "I have been dancing attendance at that police-station all day, and have not yet got to see the head—Bent, I think they call him. They have now told me he will be visible in half an hour, and I am walking my impatience off until the half-hour shall expire."

"I wish you could hear of it. It seems a strange thing altogether—unless it was lost on its way to the Castle. Were the contents of so very much consequence to you?"

"They were of the very utmost consequence to the owner. Strictly speaking, neither the box nor its contents belonged to me, but I would rather give every shilling I possess in the world than not recover them."

"Then I sincerely hope you will recover them," she said, as Mr. Lydney rang the Hall bell; and she held out her hand to say adieu. "Indeed, you have my best wishes."

“Thank you. Yes—I feel sure I have. What was grieving you just now?” he resumed, in a low tone, as he held the hand in his, and looked straight into her eyes.

The crimson flush came over her cheeks again, but she made no answer.

“Is it anything I may share—or alleviate?”

“No, no; don’t ask me,” she hurriedly answered, as the door opened. “It was not my own trouble; it is nothing I can speak of. Thank you very much, Mr. Lydney.”

He knew just as well as she did that it concerned Wilfred, for the gossip of Danesheld had reached his ears. Maria entered. She saw her father in his study at the back of the hall, and went straight to the room.

“Papa,” she said, closing the door, and untying her bonnet-strings, partly in haste at the near approach of dinner, partly in some inward commotion, “there was an embargo laid on me, more implied than expressed, that I should not go to Wilfred’s house.”

“Of course there was,” replied Mr. Lester.

“I have come to tell you that I have trans-

gressed it, papa. Twice. The first time I went it was more by accident than of intention, and though I wished to tell you then, I had not the courage. This afternoon I have been again."

Mr. Lester surveyed his daughter for a minute in silence. "And pray what took you there?"

"I went to see Edith. Papa, I fear she is dying."

The gold glasses across Mr. Lester's nose—for he had been reading a letter when interrupted by Maria—went down with a chink. He made no answer.

"And she is dying of hunger—of famine," continued Maria, catching up her breath with a sobbing sigh. "Dying of famine, papa."

"Don't talk absurdly," came the angry reproof.

"It is so, papa. Edith cannot eat the coarse food they procure—chiefly bread and vegetables—and she is sinking for the want of better nourishment. Sally tells me she is just dying slowly of famine and neglect. Slowly dying. Oh, papa! will you not help them? Let me take her something from our superfluities."

It may be that a question crossed Mr. Lester of whether he might venture (having his wife before his mind) to accede to the prayer, for he hesitated. But only for a moment.

"No, Maria. Wilfred and his wife have deliberately brought this state of things on themselves, defying me ; and they must abide by it."

The tears went streaming down from Maria's eyes. "If you would but give me a little ready money for them, papa—if you——"

"Be silent," testily interrupted Mr. Lester. Ready money had become a scarce commodity with him ; and his daughter was making him feel disagreeably uncomfortable. As to "famine," he put that down to a flight of imagination.

"It is no affair of yours, Maria ; they have brought it on themselves, I say. I desire that you do not go near Wilfred's place again."

"Please do not impose that command upon me," she interrupted, in her sobbing emotion. "I am not sure—dear papa, pardon my saying so—but I am not sure I could strictly obey it. He is my brother ; he is deserted of all ; and I fear it may be my duty to stand by him a little—even

though you bade me not. Do not bar all intercourse. I will promise to go but rarely—never unless occasion should seem to need it; and if you like, I will always tell you that I have been. Our mother is dead; you have other ties: but I and Wilfred stand alone.”

Not a word spoke Mr. Lester. He was taken by surprise, possibly. Never had he seen his daughter display agitation like this. After a moment's pause, Maria turned slowly to the door, and had unlatched it, when he addressed her.

“If you are determined to take your own course in this matter, why did you speak to me?”

“I could not be disobedient without telling you, papa. I wanted you to know why I am obliged to lie.”

He said nothing more, and Maria quitted the room. Ah! but she had not told him all she had hoped to do. She had been wishing to hint at the unpleasant rumours touching Wilfred's doings, as an additional reason why he should be helped; but her courage failed her.

The clang of the dinner-bell was heard, and as Maria went up stairs, her bonnet pulled down so

as to shade her face, she met Lady Adelaide in dinner dress, a fan and bouquet in her hand.

“Don’t you intend to appear at table to-day, Miss Lester?” she coldly asked. “That’s the bell, I think.”

“Oh, thank you, Lady Adelaide; never mind me to-day,” was the answer given, as if the speaker were choking. “I have the headache. I don’t think I could eat.”

My lady swept on down the stairs, and poor Maria crept up. Tiffle came out of a nook near the study, and cast a stealthy glance after Maria.

“Shouldn’t I like to have the shaking of that young woman! I’d make her remember her interference—with her Wilfreds and her famishing! My lady must be warned of this plot; Guy Fox’s was a fool to it.”

By which it may be inferred that Tiffle had mysteriously heard what passed inside the study of Mr. Lester.

Meanwhile Mr. Lydney went again to the police-station, and found Inspector Bent waiting for him. As before, he was accommodated with a chair inside the railings of the front room,

underneath the gas-burner, but was not taken to any more private place. They had lighted up early at the station to-night. The inspector stood in the shade, leaning against the desk in a careless fashion, listening carelessly (as it seemed) to what the applicant said. In reality, he was at work most attentively and cautiously, every eye and ear being open to gather what he could of Mr. Lydney and his belongings.

"Am I to understand that you accuse Lord Dane of stealing the box?" asked the inspector.

"I do not accuse him, not having sufficient proof at hand," was the bold answer. "That Lord Dane had the box taken away in the cart is indisputable; that it must have reached the Castle appears almost equally indisputable; and also, in my opinion, that it entered it. Where, then, is the box? Lord Dane does not give it up; he either cannot, or he will not—one of the two; and the only course of action left to me, by which I may obtain redress, is to have the Castle searched by the police."

"But only think what an insult that would be

on my Lord Dane," said Mr. Bent, fencing with the question. "You must remember who he is—a peer of Great Britain, lord-lieutenant of the county, lord of the manor, a man of high character—"

"High character!" interrupted the young gentleman.

"Why, yes—high character, and very high," answered Mr. Bent, staring at the applicant.

"Have you anything to urge against him?"

"That I have, if he has taken my box."

"Enough!" said the inspector, tartly. "Before we can listen to any such charge—if you were thinking of making it—we must know who it is that would bring it."

"What difference does that make?"

"It makes all the difference," was the significant answer. "Were any unknown worthless fellow to come to us with some got-up complaint against Lord Dane, we should show him the door for his temerity; but were any such complaint preferred by a gentleman of character and position, it might carry weight. Now do you see the distinction?"

Such distinction of course Mr. Lydney could not fail to see.

"I am a gentleman, if you require that assurance," he observed. "I am entitled to position."

"Can you prove it?"

"You have my word for it."

The inspector smiled in a way that annoyed Mr. Lydney. But he continued quietly :

"It is a word that has never been doubted yet."

"Maybe, sir ; but words don't go for much in law, unless backed by proofs. You are an American, we have been given to understand?"

"In so far as that I was born on the soil—no further. My father was an Englishman, my mother French. My father's family are of repute in England, and know how to hold their own."

The inspector's ears were opened an inch wider, and his tongue was ready.

"Where do they live? In what part of England? Lydney? Lydney? The name is not familiar to me as borne by any family of note."

"I cannot give you further information. It is as I have told you, and you must trust to my word."

"But where can be the objection to speak out?" urged the officer.

"That is my business," was the cool reply.

"Very well, sir; you have said just as much as I expected you to say, and no more," returned the police-officer. "You assert that you are somebody grand and great, and when I ask you for corroborative proof you decline to give it. Now, *do* you think that any charge from you against my Lord Dane would be listened to?"

Lydney regarded him in silence. He was thinking.

"Will you tell me what your business may be in this neighbourhood?—and how long you intend to stop in it?"

"My business in the neighbourhood!" echoed Mr. Lydney. "Why, did not the sea cast me upon it? As to my remaining, if I choose to remain in it for good, I believe there is no law to prevent me. I can promise you one thing: I don't quit it until the box is found."

"Our conference is at an end, sir," said the inspector. "My time is valuable."

"Am I to understand that the police refuse

their assistance to me in my efforts to recover the box?"

"Not at all," more cordially replied Mr. Bent; "we should be very glad to find it for our own satisfaction. What we decline to do, is to act in any offensive manner towards Lord Dane. Especially," he pointedly added, "when an unknown stranger, and one who won't declare anything about himself, urges it. But now, sir, I am not ill-natured, and if it will ease your mind at all to know it, I can testify that the box is not in the Castle."

"You cannot know that it is not."

"I never testify to a thing that I don't know," returned Mr. Bent. "I searched the Castle myself for it this day."

"You!"

"I did. I searched it effectively and thoroughly. There was not a space the size of that," holding up two fingers of his hand, "that I did not go into. When you went to the length of applying for a search-warrant this morning, we thought it time to acquaint my Lord Dane, and I stepped up to the Castle towards middle day. My lord was

indignant, which was to be expected, and said he'd see you far enough before you should search his house. But he cooled down in a few minutes, and said if I liked to go through it for my own satisfaction, I might. I availed myself of the offer, and can swear the box is not in the Castle. Every place that it was possible to put a box in was thrown open to me by the butler, who seemed as anxious to find the box as you can be. It is not in Dane Castle, and, I feel persuaded, never was in it."

The information took Mr. Lydney by surprise.

"Then where can it be? What can have become of it?" he exclaimed aloud."

"I can't say; to my mind, it's a queer business altogether," acknowledged Mr. Bent. "I don't much like the fact of that Granny Bean's Shad having been near the cart when it was unloading. That imp would lay his hands on anything he could; a japanned box, got up from a wreck, would be the very treasure he'd like to finger. Still, that idea does not go for much with me. That he did not carry it off himself is cer-

tain—first, because he could not, from its weight ; next, because I have evidence that when the cart went away empty, he shambled, empty-handed, after it.”

“ You have been collecting evidence upon this loss, I perceive.”

“ Undoubtedly. When losses take place, especially mysterious ones, it is our business to do so. We were yesterday in possession of all the facts—so far as they go.”

“ And what are your deductions ?” asked Mr. Lydney. “ Can you give a guess at how or where the abstraction took place ?”

“ Not the faintest. It’s about as uncertain a case as ever I had to do with. It is your own box, I think you said ?” the inspector carelessly added, with a keen rapid glance of the eye.

“ I did not say so. It was in my charge, and I have authority to claim it as such ; but neither the box nor its contents belonged to me.”

“ May I inquire whose it was ?”

“ When the box shall be found,” was Mr. Lydney’s rejoinder ; and his caution did not tell well for him with the man in authority. “ I may

rely, then, upon your efforts to help me in finding the property?"

"Yes—in a legitimate way. We'll do our best."

Mr. Lydney went out, the inspector standing at the door and looking after him, as he disappeared in the darkness of the evening. In acknowledging that it was a "queer" business, Mr. Bent spoke exactly as he thought; and now that he had seen and conversed with the claimant, he put aside that idea first suggested by Lord Dane, of any nefarious acting on Lydney's part. The young man's bearing and speech were those of an honest man and a gentleman; and Mr. Bent had found himself a great deal less short with him than he had previously intended to be.

"I'll be hanged if there isn't something about him that puts me in mind of the old Lord Dane!" said the inspector, arousing himself from his train of thought. "He has got just the same commanding way. As to the box—— Halloa, sir! is it you back again?"

"It has occurred to me that it might be of use to offer a reward for the recovery of

the box," said Mr. Lydney. "What do you think?"

"Well, yes, it might," answered the inspector. "I have been turning the matter in my mind this last minute or two, and think the box must have been stolen from the cart on its way to the Castle. I can't see any other loophole of probability. We have got two or three loose characters in Danesheld, I can tell you, sir—older and stronger than that Shad. If any of them were hanging about, why, that's how the job was done; and in that case, a reward would be almost sure to get the box back."

"Then be so good as to take the necessary steps to announce it. Spare no trouble, no time, no expense; you shall be well repaid."

"Very good, sir. What reward shall we say? Five pounds? ten pounds?"

"Offer a thousand pounds."

"*Sir!*" cried the inspector, backing a step or two in his astonishment.

"A thousand pounds; to be paid to any one who shall restore the box intact," continued Mr. Lydney, as quietly as though he had said a thousand pence.

"A thousand pounds!" echoed the inspector, startled at the munificence of the amount. "The box must be valuable, sir, and you rich, to offer that."

"The box, to its owner, is valuable. As to the money, it would be paid from his pockets, not from mine."

"A tithe of the money would fetch back a score of such boxes, whatever their contents, from the minor sort of base characters we have about here, whose business chiefly consists of poaching and smuggling."

"And," pursued Mr. Lydney, "as you have remarked upon my being unknown, I may as well mention that vouchers for the money can be deposited with you whenever you please, as a guarantee for the good faith of my offer."

He turned with the last word, and departed. Mr. Inspector Bent gazing after him, and unable just yet to recover from his amaze.

"I said it looked queer all along," was his mental comment. "A thousand pounds! What on earth can the box have got inside it?"

CHAPTER XI.

A BATTLE ROYAL.

MR. LYDNEY walked away with a slow step, his brain working. The assurance of the police that his box was not in Dane Castle upset his previous conclusions; he began to think he had misjudged Lord Dane, and to fall into the theory of the inspector, as the only feasible probability remaining—that the box had been abstracted on its way to the Castle. If so, there was one person who must undoubtedly have witnessed the theft—and that was Shad.

Somewhat impulsive in what he did, and very anxious, William Lydney determined to seek Shad on the instant, and question him again. Mr. Shad was perhaps keeping the secret, but a glance too cunning, or a word too sharp, might betray the fact. He was not quite sure which road would best conduct him to the hut inhabited by Granny

Bean ; he had a general impression that it lay on the outer border of the wood, and concluded it must be down somewhere by Wilfred Lester's. So he marched along, swiftly now, in the starlight of the summer's evening, until he came to Wilfred's cottage.

"I believe now I ought to have gone on by Miss Bordillion's, and taken the further turning," he soliloquised, halting in his course. "Suppose I ask Lester?"

Opening the gate, he stepped into the little porch, where something occurred that startled him considerably. The door opened stealthily, and he was pounced upon by a tall female, and pulled towards the dark passage. It was no other than Sally. She held him in a tight grip, and spoke in a covert whisper.

"Thanks be to goodness that you've not gone yet! Now it's of no use your being angry and struggling to get off! I have had you in my arms when you were a baby, Mr. Wilfred, and I know what's right and what's wrong. I've heard a whisper that the keepers are going on the watch to-night, and there'll be bloodshed again, as sure

as death, if the poachers show themselves. You sha'n't go then, sir! You are killing your wife outright, for she's beginning to suspect something. I've just been vowing you are in the kitchen, smoking your pipe up the chimbley. Come in, master, and let me bar the door; come in."

"My good woman," he exclaimed, when he had got free, and found breath to speak, "for whom do you take me? I am Mr. Lydney. Is your master at home?"

Sally fell against the wall, never speaking. Mr. Lydney repeated his question.

"I'm just a fool and nothing else," cried she, turning the matter off with a laugh. "I've been expecting a friend to call to-night, and I thought it was him. You must please to forgive me, sir. Master? No, sir, I think he must have gone out. I've been up in my mistress's sick-room, and can't find him in the house."

"Never mind. I merely called to ask some of you to direct me to Goody Bean's. Am I going right for it?"

"Yes, sir; straight on. You'll have to keep to the left of that triangle field that divides the

wood, and you'll come to the place in a few minutes—a little low cottage hid in the trees, standing all by itself. Sir," she added, in a sort of jerking tone, "I beg your pardon for my mistake, and I hope you'll not think about it, or talk of it."

"Not I," answered Mr. Lydney, with a laugh. "Make my compliments to your master."

The laugh was a pleasant one, the tone gay, purposely made so; nevertheless, the woman's ominous though unintentional disclosure, struck a chill on William Lydney's heart. It seemed a confirmation of the damaging rumours that were being whispered.

A few minutes brought him to a low dwelling, half cottage, half hut, on the borders of the wood, which he had no doubt was Goody Bean's domicile. It was closely shut up, and he might have imagined its inmates, Granny and Shad, had retired to rest, but for the commotion that was taking place within. Now rose an old woman's voice in shrill shrieks of rage; now Shad's in shriller whines. Mr. Lydney knocked first on the door, then on the shutters; but little chance

was there of his being heard while the noise lasted.

"You wicked young imp!" he heard her say, with a profuse sprinkling of worse language, which the reader would not care to have transcribed; "to go and rob your granny of her hard-earned savings! You'll come to the gallows, you will."

"It's not yourn," returned Shad, his denial interspersed with similar embellishments of speech. "The new 'gen'alman gave it me yesterday for telling him about the box, and I'll take my oath to it. Come; hand it over."

"You vile story-teller! As if any gen'alman would go and give *you* a whole silver sixpence! Now, will you be off? You ought to have been on the watch a good half-hour ago."

Mr. Shad apparently turned restive. "I won't go on the watch," said he. "I won't stir till I gets my sixpence. I've kep' it in my pocket till I gets twopence more, to buy that there grey rabbit off Ned Long."

A fresh contest, sounds of blows and shrieks, and a final shout of triumph from Shad, which

seemed to proclaim him the victor. Mr. Lydney gave a thundering peal on the shutters.

Total silence supervened: the summons had been heard, and evidently startled the disputants. There ensued some stealthy movements inside, and Mr. Lydney thought he heard a door shut. He knocked again.

It brought forth the head of the woman to a window-casement on the right. The cottage had two rooms, both on the ground-floor, a window in each. She opened the shutters, and thrust her face through the aperture, reconnoitering—a red and wrinkled face, surmounted by a cap in tatters, the result probably of the recent conflict; the whole shaking as if she were suffering from palsy.

“Have you been committing murder here?” demanded Mr. Lydney.

“I was a saying of my prayers out loud, if that’s murder,” returned the dame. “What now? what do you mean?”

The bold assertion took away his ready speech for a moment. Where was the use of bandying words with such a woman? “I want Shad,” he resumed.

"Shad! I can't go for to disturb him from his rest to-night. Shad's abed and asleep."

"Why, you audacious old creature!" he could not help exclaiming, "I wonder you dare tell so deliberate a falsehood! You and Shad have just been at it, tooth and nail, fighting after a sixpence. Let me tell you the sixpence is his, for I gave it him."

"Now, did you indeed, sir?" was the bland whining answer, the surly tone changing as if by magic. "What a dear, good, generous gentleman you must be! You haven't got another about you, to bestow in charity upon a poor, lone, wretched, half-starved widder, have you? I'd remember you in my prayers ever after, I would."

"If I had fifty, I would not give you one; and I don't imagine your prayers will do yourself much good, let alone anybody else. I want Shad, I say."

"Shad's abed and asleep, which I'll swear to, and I darden't break into his night's rest," was the impudent retort. "A delicate child as he is, and the stay and staff o' my life—if I was to lose him, I should die of grief. Come any time in the

morning, sir, when his night's rest's over, and you're welcome. I tucked him up, the darling, an hour ago, in his little bed, and a sweet sleep he dropped off into."

"Of all the extraordinary characters I think you must be the worst!" exclaimed Mr. Lydney. "Shad's no more in bed than I am. I heard your conflict, I tell you. These false assertions sound perfectly awful from a woman at your time of life."

"Strange noises is heard outside this hut at times; folks have said so afore," said the old woman, with a sniff. "It's the witches a playing in the air, I fancy; and it's them you must have heard—unless it was me at my prayers."

"Will you send out Shad?"

"I'm sure I'd obleege you in any ways but that, such a nice gentleman as you seem to be; but I wouldn't wake up my poor sickly gran'child for anything—no, not if you offered me the fifty sixpences."

Giving a good-night to Granny Bean more emphatic than polite, Mr. Lydney strode away. He must put off seeing Shad until the morning. He struck round to the back of the hut, where he

believed he should find a path that led direct through the wood, which would cut off a portion of the way homewards. Curiosity induced him to turn and look at the cottage, and there he saw a door; so Master Shad and his reputable granny had ingress and egress by back and by front.

Pursuing the path, which was narrower than he had expected, Mr. Lydney sped on with a smart step, buried in thought. It was a light night in the open ground, but gloomy where he was. He had got half way through the wood, very dense there, when a sound as of one pushing through the thick brambles caught his ear. Knowing that certain suspicious characters were said to haunt the place, Mr. Lydney drew himself just within the trees, and looked out to see who might be approaching.

It was Wilfred Lester. Panting, eager, excited, he came tearing along, at a right angle with Lydney, where no path seemed to be. He crossed the open path by a bound, penetrated the trees on its opposite side, and went pushing on, as though he were making straight for home, and clearing a way to get to it.

Mr. Lydney remained immovable. Not looking after him, for the trees prevented that, but wondering what the movement could mean, and what Wilfred was about. That he was in excessive agitation was apparent, and the words spoken by the servant when she had so unceremoniously made a prisoner of him rose with apprehension to his mind. He was, as the saying runs, "putting that and that together," and by no means liking the look of things, when something else attracted his attention.

Stealing out into the path in the trail left by Wilfred Lester, came Mr. Shad like a young hound scenting its prey. Once in the path, he made a dead stoppage, unconscious that any eye or ear was near him.

"He's tore home to his house," soliloquised he aloud, looking at the direction in which Wilfred Lester had disappeared. "No good to track him further to-night. I'll go and tell her."

Mr. Lydney had stretched out his hand to lay it on the boy, but a second impulse prompted him to hesitate. Far better follow this erratic gentleman, and discover, if possible, what treason was

being hatched. That some plot was afoot against Wilfred Lester, that he was being watched for his own destruction, Mr. Lydney felt convinced. He also felt pretty nearly convinced of another thing—that Wilfred was hatching enough mischief of his own accord against himself.

Shad flew along the path in the opposite direction to Granny Bean's, and when at the end of the wood, near to Squire Lester's, struck amidst the trees to the right. Mr. Lydney followed. Agile and slender, he could penetrate the trees as well as Shad; and when Shad stopped, he stopped.

Shad was in his favourite attitude: twined just like a snake round the thin stem of an outer tree skirting the road. Mr. Lydney halted sufficiently near to see and hear. He wondered who the "her" was to whom Shad was bound. Having had experience by this time of the insatiable nature of Madame Ravensbird's curiosity, and of her large amount of information on all subjects, a half suspicion crossed his mind that she might be the audience expected by Shad. Not so, however.

In answer to a soft whistle of Shad's, a female

emerged from a low gate on the opposite side of the road, which gate led direct to the back entrance of Squire Lester's house. She crossed the road with a stealthy and shambling gait, not unlike Shad's own, pushed within the trees, and stood with Shad in a small clear space amidst them. Mr. Lydney recognised her for the upper servant at the Hall—Tiffle.

“Well?” began she, rather sharply.

“He's gone right off home,” said Shad, in answer. “When I got up to 'em, they was having hot words—him, and Beecher, and Drake, and another, which I think were Bill Nicholson. Lester was a blowing of 'em up for wanting to go right off where the keepers would be, which might cause blood to be spilt, he said; and they got in a passion one and 'tother, and Lester he swore he'd have nothing to do with 'em, and went off back again. I say, Mrs. Tiffle, where'll be the pull 'o my dodging him, if he takes to shirking?”

“How did they ferret out where the keepers would be?” asked Tiffle, who had listened in silence.

"Can't tell," answered Shad. "I only got up at the tail o' their confab. I didn't hear nothing of what they'd been saying afore."

"Then you were late; and a wicked, inattentive, good-for-nothing little villain."

"Yes, I were late, and it were granny's fault," boldly announced Shad. "She set on me and a'most killed me. You should be hid in the oven some day, and see her in her tantrums; you'd not believe it was anything but Old Nick's mother let loose. Look here! here's where she bited me, and here's where she kicked at me, and here's where she scratted me, and clutches of my hair she tore out by han'fuls."

Shad exhibited various damaged spots about his face and arms, and let fall a shower of piteous tears. Tiffle became remarkably demonstrative in her sympathy, clasping Shad to her with tenderness, and kissing the places with her own lips. It caused Mr. Lydney's eyes to open—in more senses than one.

"My poor boy! Granny's a regular hyenia when she's put up. I'll be even with her. What did she do it for?"

"She have got the nastiest, slyest ways," returned Shad, who appeared not to relish the embrace in an equal degree with Tiffle, and wriggled himself from it as soon as he possibly could. "She dives into my pockets, she do, and to-night she found a sixpence in 'em, and she set on and swore it were hern, and said I'd robbed her on't, and she grabbed it from me, and—my! wasn't there a shindy! and such a row came to the shutters amid it. I got it again, though," concluded Shad, with glee, as he took out the bright sixpence and exhibited it to Tiffle. "Why, she haven't got a sixpence to grab!"

Tiffle did not look at it with equanimity. She came to the conclusion that somebody had been robbed of it, if not Granny Bean, and her affectionate mood changed into wrath.

"You little divil, you! If you begin to grab money now, you'll end your days a working in gangs and irons. Now you just tell me where you stole that."

"If ever I see the like! You're as bad as granny," whined the boy. "I might as well be a mad dog, and roped up at once! That there six-

pence was gave me by a gen'alman ; gived out and out."

"Gave for what?" sharply responded Tiffle.

"For telling about his box. It's that tall spark what's stopping at the Sailors' Rest. He asked me did I see the things took up to the Castle gates, and I said I see 'em; and then he said if I'd tell him the truth, and no lie, whether the box went into the Castle or not, I should get a six-pence; and I did tell him, and he give it me."

"Did you see the box taken in?" quickly asked Tiffle.

"What should ail me?" responded Shad. "I were stood there watching."

"And it was taken right in?"

"It was took right in," answered Shad, his eyes glistening; "as right in as ever anything was took into that Castle yet. Them two miller's chaps carried of it, like they did 'tother lots; and that big Mr. Bruff might have see'd 'em if he'd looked, only he was talking to a lady what passed."

"That young fellow's name's Lydney, Shad; and——"

"*I* know," interrupted Shad, with a careless

emphasis that seemed to carry with it an assurance there were few things he did not know.

"Well, I want you to keep your eyes on that Lydney," proceeded Tiffle. "Look after him just as keen as you are looking after Will Lester. He looks like a gentleman, but he might be one of them gentlemen that come to places after watches, and chains, and rings; and I heard my Lord Dane drop a doubt of him. You find out what you can. I've got my reasons. And just you note down in your head whenever you see him with Miss Lester."

Mr. Lydney, from his hiding - place, felt infinitely indebted to her.

"I've see'd him often with her," returned Shad. "I see'd him with her this evening. They went right up to the Hall together. He have took to come to the wood, too, he have, that Lydney! And, I say, Mrs. Tiffle, Miss Lester went to her brother's place this evening."

"Yes, she did," said Tiffle acrimoniously. "But now there's no more to be done to-night, Shad, and you cut home as quick as you can, and get to bed."

"And if granny sets on me again?" whined Shad.

"Leave granny to me; I'll see to her."

Shad turned into the wood; Tiffle looked cautiously out on either side, and then whisked across the road. She had barely gained the gate leading to Mr. Lester's premises, when my Lord Dane appeared from the direction of Miss Bordillion's. He was probably coming from the railway station. The line of rail had now been extended on to Danesheld (and perhaps this has been mentioned already, but I forget), its station being beyond Miss Bordillion's, and this was the nearest way to it from the Castle. Tiffle waited at the gate when she saw who it was.

"Is it you, Tiffle?" cried his lordship, gaily.
"Enjoying a ramble by starlight?"

"Oh, my lord, you are pleased to joke," simpered Tiffle. "My days for starlighted rambles are over. I leave 'em for the young now, my lord; I've had my turn. This evening that ever was, I see Miss Lester walking cosy in the starlight—leastway, the evening star was out—and I thought how romintic it was; putting me in mind of my

own sentimental days, my lord. That gentleman was with her that the wreck cast up."

Had it been daylight instead of starlight, Tiffle would scarcely have presumed to fix her eyes so keenly upon my Lord Dane. Of all cunning women, she wore the palm, and she knew she was throwing out a shaft that would tell.

"Wrecks cast up rogues as well as gentlemen," observed his lordship, in a tone of stern displeasure. "An American, whom nobody knows, is scarcely one to be walking by starlight with Miss Lester. Good night, Tiffle."

Every word could be heard by William Lydney in his retreat, from which he had not yet been able to get away. The road was very narrow ; in fact, it was more of a lane than a road ; and the tones came over it with perfect distinctness in the still night.

Lord Dane walked on, and Tiffle disappeared from view. But Mr. Lydney felt by no means sure she was not on the watch still, and therefore he did not choose to step out into the road and show himself. He penetrated further into the wood to gain a cross path that would bring him out

at the back of the town. His rambles with Wilfred Lester, who seemed to prefer the wood for exercise to the open country, had rendered him tolerably familiar with it.

This appeared to be a night prolific for Mr. Lydney in adventures and encounters. As he was pursuing his way, he came in sudden contact with a man dragging himself covertly and noiselessly through the trees—a youngish man, so far as could be distinguished, who appeared alarmingly startled at the encounter, and levelled his gun.

“Halloa, my man ! what’s that for?” demanded Mr. Lydney, speaking with equanimity, and showing neither fear nor hurry. “Have the goodness to drop that.”

“If you don’t say who you are, and what you are doing here, I’ll shoot you,” was the reply.

“I feel infinitely obliged to you. Have you any more right to be in the wood than I have ? I should be glad to know.”

Mr. Lydney spoke with courtesy ; and the man could not fail to remark that his voice was that of a gentleman. He had no doubt feared a keeper.

"You were posted there to watch me?" he exclaimed.

"Nay," said Mr. Lydney; "I may with equal reason reverse the accusation, and say you were watching me. I don't know who you are; I never saw you in my life that I know of. Why should I watch you? You must have escaped from a lunatic asylum."

The man let fall his gun. He had been peering at Mr. Lydney as well as the obscurity allowed him, and made out that he was not a foe.

"I ask your pardon for my haste," he said;—"I thought you were somebody else. The fact is, none but suspicious characters are ever prowling in the wood so late as this, unless it's those confounded keepers, who are ever ready to swear an innocent man's life away."

Mr. Lydney laughed—a kindly laugh. He had no objection to a spice of adventure—was just of the age and temperament to relish it.

"Are you aware of the self-insinuation those words imply? Nobody but suspicious characters? Meaning, I conclude, poachers."

"And keepers too," growled the man.

"Very good. I am neither the one nor the other. If you choose to beat about this wood from January to December, a gun in one hand, and snare-nets in the other, you are welcome, for all the business it is of mine. Were they my preserves, it would be a different matter."

"You won't go and say to-morrow that you dropped upon me here with a gun."

"I should be clever to say it, seeing I know you neither by sight nor name. But if you prefer a specific promise, you may take it. Life is short enough, my man; better pass it in kindness than in doing gratuitous injuries."

The poacher liked the tones, liked the words; and that rather hardened part within him which did duty for a heart, went out at once to the speaker in a manner he would have been puzzled to account for.

"I think, sir, you are the gentleman stopping at the Sailors' Rest, whose box is missing? I nearly got into trouble over that box yesterday."

"How was that?" inquired Mr. Lydney, his interest suddenly awakened.

"I happened to be passing the Castle on my

way home as the cart was unloading, and I halted a few minutes and looked on. Those keen police got to know of it, and I'll be hanged if they didn't have me up to the station? Whether they thought I had walked the box off, or had seen anybody else walk it off, I don't know. I laughed at them. Young Shad and two or three more urchins could testify that I didn't go near enough to touch anything on the cart."

"You must have heard the box described. Did you see it?"

"I did not see it, sir, to my recollection. But if, as I hear, it was underneath the rest of the things, I was not likely to. I stopped but a few minutes, and they had only then begun to unload."

"You cannot guess where it is gone, or who took it, I suppose?" resumed Mr. Lydney.

"No, I can't; I have not thought much about it. That Shad's as ready-fingered as a magpie, but they say it was too heavy for him to lift."

"I would give a good reward if it were restored to me untampered with."

"Would you, though?" quickly rejoined

the poacher, as if the sound were music to his ears.

"Fifty guineas."

"Fifty guineas!" uttered the man, as much astonished as the inspector had been that evening at mention of the thousand pounds.

"Fifty guineas, and no questions asked, provided it be restored to me before to-morrow night. After that, a different offer may be made, *and* questions asked—pretty sharp ones."

"By jingo! that's worth looking after," exclaimed the man. "I know a fellow or two who *have* done a little in the fingering line, sir, and I'll—I'll be on to them. If I can hear of the box, you shall have it on those terms. Honour bright, though?"

"Honour bright, on the word of a gentleman. The fifty guineas shall be paid, and no inquiries made. I fancy you may perhaps hear of it among your friends."

Little cared Mr. Ben Beecher junior—for it was no other—for the last delicate insinuation. A golden vision had been opened to him, and in that he was absorbed.

But the two, so strangely met, were not to part without being observed. Ben Beecher offered to show Mr. Lydney a short cut out of the wood that would bring him nearer the Sailors' Rest than the egress he had been making for. The outlet gained, Ben Beecher was stealing back into the wood again, when Mr. Lydney stopped him for a parting word.

"You will not fail me?"

"I'll not fail, if the box is to be had. But look here, sir," added the man after a minute's thought, "couldn't you meet me here in the wood? I'd not care to be seen going after you to the Sailors' Rest."

Now it happened at this critical juncture that no less an individual should be passing than my Lord Dane. Cattley's cottage lay in this direction, the gamekeeper who had been injured—he was progressing but slowly, and Lord Dane, in his affability, had turned out of his way on leaving Tiffle to make a personal inquiry after the man. He stayed a few minutes with him, and was walking briskly back, on his way home, when the sound of voices caught his ear.

Recognising the one for Mr. Ben Beecher's, Lord Dane's thoughts naturally flew to the poachers, who were giving him at that time a great deal of trouble. Following the moment's impulse, he stepped aside amidst the trees as noiselessly as Mr. Beecher himself could have done, and gazed through at the speakers. Yes, sure enough, there was Mr. Ben Beecher, gun in hand; the other one Lord Dane could not see, but felt convinced it was either Drake or Bill Nicholson—the latter, he thought, by the height. He hushed his breath, for this one was beginning to speak.

"Why so?" was the short question asked of Beecher. And Lord Dane seemed to have a confused remembrance of the voice; and it was not Nicholson's.

"Well, for reasons," answered Beecher. "I'd rather you were not seen openly working with me in this, sir, if you can understand me."

"I daresay you wouldn't, Mr. Beecher!" mentally apostrophised my Lord Dane from his hiding-place.

"I'll be at the fairy circle in the wood—the spot we passed two or three minutes ago—at eight



o'clock to-morrow night, if that will do," continued Beecher.

"Very well," replied the voice that was puzzling Lord Dane. "I'll meet you there at that hour."

"All right—all right," mentally repeated Lord Dane. "I'll be down upon you, my gentlemen, to-morrow night. Whose is that voice? I've heard it somewhere."

Stretching his neck up, he prepared to take a good view, for he to whom the voice belonged was coming forth. And the view nearly drove Lord Dane backwards.

Lydney!

His lordship rubbed his eyes to make sure he was awake. That this interview and the one appointed for to-morrow night could have reference to anything but poaching purposes never entered his imagination. He was very excessively astonished, and came to the conclusion that Mr. William Lydney was even a lower and a more disreputable character than he had doubted him of being.

"I'll lay any money he stole the box origin-

ally!" cried his lordship. "Perhaps ran away with it from America."

Mr. Lydney was already out of sight, making the best of his way to the Sailors' Rest. He went straight into Sophie's private parlour, as he frequently did. Madame Sophie was just finishing her supper of bread and salad, with some thin claret wine. She wore a coquettish cap of lace and scarlet ribbons, and a black silk perfectly-fitting gown, with narrow bands of Irish linen, by way of collar and cuffs.

Mr. Lydney sat down and began gossiping—or it may be more correct to say, that he said a word or two to set her off, and she gossiped. Insensibly he continued to lead her to the subject of the Beechers—in particular, to young Mr. Ben. Mrs. Ravensbird tossed her head.

"A nice lot, those Beechers! The old father was nothing but a smuggler; and the son's a poacher. A very nice lot they are, sir!"

"He's quite a young man, is he not, the son?"

"Not much over twenty. Old Beecher did not marry till he was getting in years."

“Rather superior for what he is, I fancy, that young Beecher?”

“He might have been,” returned Sophie, with a considerable amount of scorn, meant for Mr. Beecher, junior. “His mother was a very respectable woman indeed, sir, with a life income; old Beecher married her at a distance, and it’s thought he deceived her as to his position and means. As long as she lived, the boy was well taken care of,—sent to boarding school, and all that; but he has gone all wrong since she died, and idles his time away shamefully.”

Ah! this explanation accounted for what had rather surprised William Lydney—the superiority in Ben Beecher’s accent and manner as compared with his condition in life.

CHAPTER XII.

A DISCLOSURE TO WILFRED LESTER.

PERCHED on the arm of the sofa in his little sitting-room, the sun shining brightly on him and his employment—that of making artificial flies for fishing—was Wilfred Lester. It was the morning following the night mentioned in the last chapter, and Mr. Wilfred was giving his thoughts to sundry events of that night a great deal faster than he was to his flies.

Had he been more observant, he might have seen that something was troubling his wife in an unusual degree. She sat on the sofa, partially reclining on it, her head leaning on the opposite arm to where Wilfred was sitting. A fair fragile girl she looked—her features painfully delicate, her blue eyes unnaturally bright, her light hair taking a tinge of gold in the sunlight. She wore a white wrapper, or dressing-gown, which made

her appear still more of an invalid. Glancing at her husband once or twice, as though she wished to say something and could not, she at length burst forth with a courage born of desperation, her voice timid, the words trembling on her tongue :

“Where did you go last night, Willy?”

Mr. Wilfred Lester took a momentary and rapid glance at the speaker. Something in the tone of the question rather startled his conscience.

“Where did I go last night? Nowhere in particular, that I remember. Bother take the catgut! I was out and about, talking to one, talking to another.”

“So you always say, Wilfred;” and the girl’s tone dropped to one of dread, and she seemed to shiver as she spoke. “You had that gun out.”

“Ay. It’s lock has a trick of catching, and I meant to show it to the smith; but the shop was shut,” replied Mr. Wilfred, beginning to whistle the bars of a gay and popular song.

Perhaps the greatest misfortune that had as yet fallen upon Edith Lester, was the having been an involuntary hearer of a certain conversation a

few days back. Sally, ironing on the board before the open kitchen window, had been accosted by some passer-by, and Edith had listened to words (or, rather, to questions) regarding her husband that turned her sick and faint. "Was it true that he had joined the poachers? was it true that he had been in the recent attack what had nearly killed Cattley? was it true that he went regularly out at night? If so, he'd get taken up and transported, as sure as crabs was crabs, and apples was apples!"

Words bad enough in themselves for a poor young wife's ears, but which were rendered all the more forcible from the vehement denial of the servant. Over-zeal has the faculty of destroying itself; and Sally entered on a defence that was untruthful. She protested, in the most unblushing manner, that her master never was abroad after sunset—as how could he be, when he sat reading to his poor sick lady till bed-time, and then retired to rest with her? Granny Bean could not have done it more audaciously.

The untruthful assertion, suspicious enough in itself—for it was after sunset that Wilfred usually

her appear still more of an invalid. Glancing at her husband once or twice, as though she wished to say something and could not, she at length burst forth with a courage born of desperation, her voice timid, the words trembling on her tongue :

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"Why, Edith, what has come to you?"

"Oh, Willy, tell me the truth! Were you with the poachers when they attacked Cattley?"

"Most certainly *not*," was the emphatic answer; and he seemed in earnest enough now. "You silly girl! What next will you be fancying? I would no more join in attacking a keeper than I would attack you."

"Do—you—ever—join in taking the game wholesale?" she asked, unable to bring out her words smoothly between her weakness and agitation.

He burst into a laugh.

"Serve Lord Dane right if I did. He has sent me to Coventry ever since he came. Serve my father right if I took his, and left not a single bird for his table and Lady Adelaide's. My darling, you just reassure that poor, little, fluttering heart. I'll take care of myself and of you."

"Willy, if anything happened to you, I should die! Is it true?"

"No, it is not true," he said, very hastily, as if the denial were burning his tongue. "For goodness' sake get rid of these fancies, Edith, or you'll be

worse than you are. But for you, I should like to get into some desperate escapade; it might shame my father to reason. As it is, I shall keep straight for your sake."

The emotion had exhausted her feeble strength, and she lay down on the sofa, white, sad, and only half-convinced.

"The very fact of my continuing so hard up, and unable to get you proper necessities, Edith, might prove that I don't make a fortune at poaching."

"I have all I want," she eagerly said, lifting her wan face pleadingly to his. "Oh, Willy, don't think of me! I shall grow strong soon. It is hard for both of us just now, but if we can only be patient, it will grow better—I am sure it will. Only let us endure! Only let us put faith in God! People say we could not expect better, and are suffering for our disobedience. It may be so, but a pleasant end will come to it, Willy."

That an end must come, and not very long first, he knew; whether it would be a pleasant one, was not so certain. He went on with his fly-making, his manner gay, his heart aching for his wife's

sake, his spirit terribly rebellious against his father and Lady Adelaide. Presently, in the midst of a light song, he put down his working materials, and went into the kitchen for something he wanted. The servant sat at the table, shelling some broad beans.

"Where's the gum-bottle, Sally?"

"Up there," answered Sally, rather unceremoniously, indicating a shelf of the dresser. "But there's no gum in it, sir."

He took down the bottle, saw with a rueful look that it was as she said, and put it back again. Sally pointed to the beans.

"I don't know what's to be done for my mistress to-day. She can't eat these."

"There's a partridge in the house," answered Wilfred.

"Well, master, the truth is, she can't eat partridge any longer. She has managed to swallow a bit lately, but she's one of them, and I'm another, whose tastes turn at game. When folks are sick, too, their likes and dislikes are stronger; and you know, master, that for the last month there's been nothing but game. I have tried the par-

tridges every way to tempt her; I've roasted 'em, I've boiled 'em, I've fricasseed 'em, I've fried 'em, and one day I chopped 'em up, and made 'em into balls; but it didn't do. It *was* partridge, and that was enough. She makes a show of eating a bit before you; but her stomach heaves right again 'em now, and she can't pretend any longer."

Wilfred Lester stood by the table, gloomy and perplexed. He knew no way whatever of procuring anything else for Edith; all credit was gone. If a mutton chop would have saved her life, he must pay the butcher for it before it was sent home.

"Can't you do up some eggs for to-day?" he asked.

"I could if I had 'em. Eggs are no more to be had than anything else, without money. And there's another thing, master, staring us in the face: the coals are almost out."

Can you imagine how bitter were his feelings as he stood there, knowing that he was powerless to answer these appeals? He turned back into the parlour again, and took up his flies, gancing at

Edith. Her eyes were closed now, as if she would sleep, and the lashes lay on her wan cheek.

All in a minute, a sudden commotion arose in the kitchen. Wilfred had left the intervening doors unclosed, and the sounds penetrated to the quiet parlour as clearly as though uttered within it. Sally's voice was heard in loud, angry dispute. Wilfred turned his head, and Edith's ears and eyes opened.

"Then I say he's not in, and he won't be in to-day—that's more. So just you walk out, please."

"I say he is in," responded a man's gruff voice. "I see him with my own eyes through that there kitchen winder, and here I shall stop till I can speak to him. I've got a private message, which I can't give to you."

Wilfred Lester did not recognise the voice, but the intimation "private message" struck on his ear. Private messages, not at all expedient to intrust to other people, especially to Sally, came to him once in a way. Never a thought of treachery entering his head, he threw down his flies, and gained the kitchen with a couple of strides.

There stood Sally, armed with the tongs, which she presented at the stranger in a menacing manner to bar his further progress. The man quietly put a paper into Mr. Lester's hand, and went out with a laugh. Sally flung the tongs back on the hearth in a passion.

"Now, why couldn't you keep out of sight?" she exclaimed, in wrath. "Where's the use of me telling a hundred lies in a day for you—and I hope Heaven will forgive me—if you are to upset 'em in this way? I know what it is. As long as he didn't get to serve it; you were safe."

"He'd have got to serve it to-morrow if he hadn't to-day," answered Wilfred, opening the document. "Don't make a fuss."

"No, he needn't," retorted Sally. "You might have dodged—My goodness, missis! what's the matter?"

Edith had come into the kitchen, shaking like a leaf, the image of ghastly terror. She caught hold of her husband in an excess of hysterical emotion.

"What is it all? What paper is it? Show it me. Oh, Wilfred, show it me!"

"My dear, don't agitate yourself for nothing," he mistakenly answered, as he crumpled the paper in his hand. "It's nothing but a bill."

Sally gave a snatch at the paper; Wilfred would not let it go, and there was actually a tussle for its possession, in which the paper got torn, and Sally conquered. She was rather in the habit of domineering over the two in her superior age and wisdom.

"There, ma'am; now you can see that it's nothing but a demand for money," cried Sally, laying it open before her mistress. "Couldn't you just read that her fears were of something worse, sir?" she added, in an under-tone of reproach, to her master.

And the woman was right; her perceptive faculties were keen, her sense was strong. Edith Lester was connecting this visitor with the wild rumours afloat of the night-work; terrific visions arose of handcuffs, a prison, a criminal trial, perhaps death.

But what with one thing and another, Sally grew alarmed, and she went out that day, and laid all her trouble and fear before her late mistress,

Miss Bordillion. Wilfred Lester, in his pity for his poor young wife, in his resentment against the world, was growing more reckless, and unless substantial help came for Edith, Sally's opinion was that he'd be caught at something desperate.

"I can't take the responsibility of concealing these things any longer, ma'am," she said; "and it isn't right I should."

"But what is to be done, Sally?" was Miss Bordillion's piteous answer.

"Well, ma'am, it seems to me that if Squire Lester won't give some help, he should be made do it."

"Made!" echoed Miss Bordillion, as Sally left her.

She sat on, after the woman's departure, in sad deliberation, endeavouring to find out where her duty lay.

She was aware of a fact which, if disclosed, might bring large help to Wilfred; but in disclosing it, she would be acting directly against Mr. Lester, and be also guilty of an interference that under most circumstances would be unjustifiable. But now—but now Miss Bordillion not only

weighed the whole according to her own poor judgment, but prayed to be directed to the right. In an hour's time, she despatched a note asking Wilfred to come to her.

"I have surprised you, no doubt, by sending for you to my house, Wilfred," she said, when he entered it, for the first time since his marriage, and she drew a chair for him near to her; "but not more than I shall surprise you by what I am about to say. You know how very much I esteem Mr. Lester," she proceeded, the delicate pink rising in her cheeks. "How unwilling I have been throughout this business to say a word that could reflect on his judgment or on Lady Adelaide's——"

"Margaret, excuse me, but I'd rather not discuss Lady Adelaide. I might not keep my temper," interposed Wilfred. "It was a dark day for me and Maria when my father married her."

Margaret thought within her that it had not been a particularly bright day for somebody else. She resumed: "Did you ever know that there was a sum of money given you by Mrs. Hesketh, to be paid to you, when you came of age,"

"No; I think not."

"I am not speaking of a trifle that was left to you in her will, and which only devolves to you on the demise of Mr. Lester; I speak of a sum of twelve hundred pounds. Mrs. Hesketh was your godmother, as you know; and the day you were christened, she brought with her a deed, which she flung—I remember it well—into Katherine's lap—I should have said your mother's lap, Wilfred. It was a deed of gift of twelve hundred pounds. The money was at once paid over to Mr. Lester, and he holds it still. The deed stated that it was to be paid to you absolutely the day you were of age, your mother receiving the interest towards the cost of your maintenance."

Wilfred's dark blue eyes lighted up with a fire not recently seen there. "And where is the deed? Where's the money? Who has got it?" he reiterated.

"Mr. Lester has the deed. I spoke to him about the money a short while ago, when things were getting bad with you and Edith. His answer to me was, that the money had been paid to you in the shape of an allowance; that finding himself

unable to furnish you with funds from his own resources, he had used this money of yours for the purpose. Now, I think Mr. Lester could not do this. So far as I believe, he was bound to pay that sum of money over to you when you came of age, with all due legal formality. If so, it is due to you still; and you might, I think, claim it without further delay."

Wilfred rose up. "What a shame!" he uttered.

"Listen, Wilfred. Mr. Lester *may* have been legally justified in paying it to you, as he says. In any case, I feel sure he could no more pay you the whole sum than I could pay it. My advice to you would be to go to him in a friendly spirit, and ask what he will or can do. If he gave you a hundred pounds to begin with, it would be something."

A hundred pounds! A hundred pounds would be as a very golden mine to poor reduced Wilfred. In his glad impulse, he was darting away then, but Margaret laid her calm hand on his and made him sit down again until he should more fully understand the case, and had discussed with her his

precise line of conduct. Above all, she begged of him not to quarrel with his father.

That same afternoon, Wilfred went to Danesheld Hall, and presented himself before his father in the study. Civilly and respectfully he requested a few minutes' audience, and Mr. Lester was surprised into making no resistance to the petition. Wilfred sat down and entered on his business, temperately stating what had come to his knowledge—that there was a sum of money, twelve hundred pounds, belonging to him, now lying in his father's hands—but not stating whence he derived the information.

If Mr. Lester was taken to, he did not show it. He was perfectly cool, answering, with matter-of-fact equanimity, that Wilfred had received the money.

"I think not, sir," said Wilfred. "This money requires to be paid over to me formally, and you know that nothing of the sort has been done. You have never as much as mentioned to me that you held it."

"Miss Bordillion has been giving you this

information, I see," observed Mr. Lester. "The money was paid to you in the shape of an allowance yearly, and you spent it, which of course was your own affair."

"But the money could not be so paid to me," persisted Wilfred. "The deed of gift, as I understand, was so worded that it could not be."

"You are mistaken, Wilfred."

"Have you the deed?"

"I have. It is there."

Mr. Lester pointed to a small iron safe, which had stood in the corner of his study as long as Wilfred could remember.

"Will you allow me to read it, sir?"

"Certainly not. To what end? You can believe my word. After I had paid over the money to you as an allowance, a doubt arose to myself whether what I had done was legal, or whether I was not still responsible for the sum. Upon that, I submitted the deed to counsel."

"Well?" cried Wilfred, for Mr. Lester had stopped.

"Well, the opinion returned to me was, that

the deed was not so clearly worded as it ought to have been, and therefore the interpretation I had put upon it (that of paying over the money in a somewhat different manner from what it appeared on the whole to enjoin) would hold good."

There was a pause.

"You must let me see the deed, sir."

"I shall not let you see it," said Mr. Lester.
"To what end, I ask?"

"That I may be myself convinced that there's nothing coming to me."

"You may let my word convince you of it, for it is the truth."

And Wilfred Lester knew by the hard, set countenance, the firm tone, that further pressure on this point would be hopeless. Never, with his father's consent, would he get a sight of the deed. And the colloquy went on to hasty words: but Wilfred calmed down.

"I did not come, wishing to inconvenience you, sir. I should not think of asking for the whole sum at once," he resumed, really wishing to be friendly and to conciliate his father. "If you

would only let me have a hundred pounds of it now, I should be satisfied."

Mr. Lester quite laughed, and Wilfred, with some agitation, entered on his troubles, and craved some help as a favour, if not as a right. He showed his father the writ; he spoke of his wife's absolute necessities.

"You must be aware that you have brought all this upon yourselves. What else could you expect would come of a marriage like yours?"

"You make a show of punishing me for my marriage, but I don't suppose you blame me so much in your heart," said Wilfred, boldly. "Father, from my soul I believe you would have done the same in the same circumstances. I believe you would have sanctioned it yourself but for Lady Adelaide. She has always been my enemy; she has stood between us ever since she entered the house."

"That's enough," said Mr. Lester.

Wilfred rose. His lips were quivering, his dark-blue eyes went out with a strangely-beseeching yearning to his father's.

"Give me only a little help, father! This poor ten pounds for which I am about to be sued. I ask it for poor Edith's sake."

There was—or Wilfred fancied it—a shade of pity in Mr. Lester's countenance. It might have gone on to help—it might; but at that moment Lady Adelaide entered the room, her air and countenance bitterly imperious. She picked up her gown with a scornful gesture as she passed Wilfred to stand before her husband.

"They told me your son was here, but I did not at first believe it. Can you allow his presence here, Mr. Lester? and thus make light of filial rebellion in the sight of my children?"

"He is not here by my wish, Adelaide. I had already dismissed him. There's the door, sir. Why don't you go?" he sharply added, turning from his wife, for whom he was drawing forward a chair, the finished gentleman.

Wilfred crushed the writ into his pocket, and swung away with an ugly word, to tell Margaret of his defeated mission. By the time he reached her house, he was in a comfortable fury, and could

no more have helped giving vent to it than——
But he did not try. Mr. Lydney was there—Maria was there; but it was all one to the angry man.

“He means to keep me out of the money altogether, Margaret. He wholly refuses me a sight of the deed, though it was in the very room at his elbow. I told him my wife was dying of want; I told him I was going to the dogs, or something worse. Look here” (dashing the writ out of his pocket); “I showed him this, and begged him, like any mendicant, to help me over *this* stile, and save me from prison. But no——”

“Oh, Wilfred! what’s the matter?” came the interruption, wrung from Maria in her terror. “What is that paper?”

“Psha!” returned Wilfred, crushing it into his pocket again. “Margaret, I do think he’d have helped me a little; but Lady Adelaide came in and stopped it. If there’s justice in Heaven——Maria, what’s ailing you? Don’t pull at me like that.”

“I think you want a strait-waistcoat, Wilfred,” put in Miss Bordillion. “You will frighten me presently, as well as Maria.”

"He as good as taunted me with my wings being clipped, when I said something about going to law with him," continued Wilfred, in his passion. "I'll get at that deed if I have to break into the house while he's sleeping; I will. The money's mine, and he's afraid of my reading it."

"I'll not hear this, Wilfred," interposed Miss Bordillion, with stern authority.

"Very well. I see you are all against me. I may go to the dogs my own way."

Snatching up his hat, he went forth from the house in the same passion that he had entered it. Margaret Bordillion, regardless that she wore neither bonnet nor shawl, ran into the road after him.

Of course the scene had told Mr. Lydney a great deal. Maria, ashamed, puzzled, and terrified, began some apology for its having taken place in his presence—a stranger.

"A stranger!" he replied, standing before her. "I was in great hopes you no longer considered me in that light, Miss Lester."

"It is true," she murmured, "we do not. And

"Yes, when I have back, and remember how very short a period, counting by time, it is that we have known you. I can only wonder at the fact. We were to be like old friends; but I fear it is very kind of me to say it."

His eye passed with a smile, and somehow it brought the colour back to Maria's face. "I wish to be a friend," he said, his voice assuming a low tone of earnest confidence. "I think your brother wants one, Miss Lester. May I speak to you on this subject without reserve?"

Indeed, she required some one to do it, for her heart felt sick and faint within her for her brother's sake. She looked at Mr. Lydney by way of answer—a piteous beseeching look, and half her terror went out of her. It may have appeared to her that there was help, protection, in that fine strong form; it had long appeared to her that there was perfect truth in the good, earnest, handsome face.

"I dread—I scarcely know what it is I dread," she murmured.

"You dread that, smarting under privation and

unmerited wrong, Wilfred may be drawn into escapades not altogether honourable to the son and heir of Squire Lester?"

The son and heir! Was the last word spoken in mockery? The burning tears rushed into Maria's eyes.

"Have faith in me," he impressively said, bending a little as if to give an earnest to his words, and taking both her hands in his. "All that one man can do for another, I will do for your brother. He saved my life; I will try and save him from trouble."

"I have so loved Wilfred," she said, in apology for her fast-dropping tears; "I have until now so looked up to him; he is four years older than I am. Mamma died; papa grew estranged from us; we had only each other to care for."

"Trust to me, Miss Lester."

But she could not get her hands free, and felt rather confused in consequence, her words and manner being confused likewise.

"He is so impetuous, you see; he thinks he is being wronged; and he is painfully anxious about

his wife. Oh, Mr. Lydney, if you *could* help him ! I should not know how to thank you ; I could never repay you."

A very peculiar smile arose to his lips, a warm light illumined his eyes, and a sudden glow thrilled through Maria Lester's heart. Mr. Lydney let the hands go, for Miss Bordillion was coming in.

END OF VOL. II.

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